Jisc toolkit: supporting the digital experience of new students Further education (FE)

### Model showing the three surveys and themes for digital experience insights. The three surveys are for students, teaching staff and professional services staff. The four themes within each survey look at the digital technology available to participants (you and your technology), technology at your organisation, technology in your learning, teaching or role and developing your digital skills.About this resource

This resource is based on the findings from **our 2018-19 student digital experience insights survey**. Responses were collected from 13,389 further education students, studying at 30 colleges across the UK. The survey provides unique insights into how students are using digital technology to enhance their studies. You can download and read the full survey report at [**digitalinsights.jisc.ac.uk**](https://digitalinsights.jisc.ac.uk/)

### Using this resource

**Engage students from the start:** this resource is designed to be fully customised so that you can use it to support new students as part of their induction and onboarding processes. This could be a great project to work on collaboratively with student partners or digital champions.

**Identify and work with your lead stakeholders** **– this includes students and their representatives: i**t is likely that those with overall responsibility for the student digital experience may lead in the organisation’s approach to supporting students with the digital aspects of induction and onboarding but it will strengthen and consolidate practice if other stakeholders are involved (eg e-learning team, digital strategy team, learner experience team etc).

**Make it your own – customise the toolkit**

1. In column one: **Finding**, if your college has run the Jisc digital student experience insights survey replace the national survey findings with your own. If not, the national findings may still be relevant to your students. We think they add interest to the messages in column three, but you can decide whether to include these.
2. In column two: **Considerations for your organisation**, review the considerations against the digital experience at your college. If you have added your own data in column one, use this to guide your thinking as well.
3. Adapt the messages in column three: **Messages to students**, to reflect your situation. You may find that there are improvements that you want to make as a result of your review. This is great, but until you can put them into practice, be honest about what students can expect. Delete column two once you have finalised all the messages for new students. Check that the messages reflect what you offer and what you expect of arriving students. Add in links to your own resources and support services.
4. Finally consult with existing students (eg learner voice representatives, digital champions) about the final draft. Ask for their comments on the messages and also what advice they would give to new students. Use particularly good advice as quotes in your finished resource. You could also film students making their comments and edit these clips to create a short video resource.

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| **Be creative: rather than producing your own version you could just use this resource as a checklist for your existing student arrival and induction process. Or present the findings as a series of infographics, or an app.** |

# Theme one: your digital life

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| Headline messages to students: What digital devices (laptop, tablet, mobile phone etc) do you use for learning? Do you need special software or adaptations to help you study? Find out what’s available at your college and how your digital devices can help you to success. |

Key stakeholders: students and student representatives including digital champions/ambassadors, e-learning team, IT services, learning experience, learning resources, learner voice

## Findings and guidance

| Survey finding | Considerations for your organisation | Draft messages for students (amend to suit your organisation) |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Many college students have a **smartphone** **and 65% have a personal laptop** they can use to support their learning. Tablets and home desktops are increasingly common. However, not all of these are up to date or reliable  Only **53%** of FE students agreed that **their organisation supported them to use their own digital devices**  . | * What is the status of your bring your own device (BYOD) policy? * Make sure that on arrival students know:   + What devices are recommended for their course of study and what will be available to them   + How to log on to campus services   + How and where to get support with their devices if they need it   + How the college supports mobile access to the student desktop, VLE and other services | Our policy on using smartphones in class is…  If you don’t have your own device, talk to your course tutor or learning support team about what is available through the college…  You are responsible for keeping your devices safe in college. You can find secure lockers/charging trolleys etc as shown here…  We also have an IT buddy scheme to help you with the basics…  *(Add links and messages from your own BYOD policy)* |
| Approximately 5% of students say they **do not have access to any personal device** | * Do any loan schemes you offer allow off-campus use? * Consider whether assisted purchase schemes for laptops/tablets will be of greater benefit than loans for the most disadvantaged students |  |
| Many college students use a **mix of personal devices and college hardware**. This can make it difficult to get organised | * Consider a range of ‘bring your own’ scenarios and support requirements * Students are particularly concerned about losing work between college and personal file stores. Make sure they can access secure file space off campus, and emphasise the value of managing files, and backing up to a separate hard drive or data stick. * Make sure the college timetable is easy to access and use, and that students know how to integrate it with their own planning tools and calendars | You can access your college files and services on your own devices…  If you are having problems getting logged on, support is available here…  Find a way of managing your notes and files that works for you, and make sure you always back them up using a separate hard drive or data stick.  Our BYOD policy says…  If you’re having trouble managing files between different devices, you can access online resources… or IT support… |
| About 6% of students need **assistive technologies or adaptations** to study effectively, and a further 8% use them by choice | * The college is responsible for providing an accessible, equitable learning experience to all students. Get up to date with current legislation and what’s available for students from your learning support service or student services * Accessibility is increasingly seen as an agenda for all. There should be online guidance for students who do not identify as having special needs but who still benefit from using adaptive features or specialist apps * Find out what apps students themselves recommend for accessibility. Many students use mindmapping and note-making tools, text-to-speech, spelling and grammar checkers, as well as the accessibility features in generic software and device operating systems | Find out how you can adapt your own devices and interfaces to make learning more accessible for you. Experiment with different media too.  Many students find the following useful: mindmapping and note-making tools, text-to-speech, spelling and grammar checkers.  Many course resources are available digitally, making it easier for you to study at a time and place that suits you.  If you feel you would benefit from an assessment to see whether assistive technology could help you please contact …  Even if you don’t need an assessment, the learning support service can provide …  *(Add whatever messages your learning support and access services suggest are appropriate, plus links.)* |
| **Independence and flexibility** are benefits that students appreciate when using digital technologies | * Students can be more independent and organised if they have access to personalised timetables and progress data, and if they can access the materials they need for study at the time, place and pace they choose, using the devices they have to hand. * Ensure that investments in improving digital networks and services are prioritised according to the benefits students will experience – ideally involving students in the change process. | Make sure you can access your personal timetable and course information online, wherever you need them.  Set up your personal desktop with links to the college services you access most often… *(include links to detailed guidance on set-up and access to services)* |

# Theme two: your digital college

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| Headline messages to students: As a student you’ll have access to computer facilities such as desktops, printers, digital cameras and instruments. You’ll use general software and software that’s unique to your course. You’ll also have access to email and file storage, and a variety of digital systems. How can you use all these to achieve success? |

Key stakeholders: students and student representatives including digital champions/ambassadors, e-learning team, IT services, learning support, learning resources, learner voice

## Findings and guidance

| Survey finding | Considerations for your organisation | Draft messages for students (amend to suit your organisation) |
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| FE students said they had good access to **computers and printers** in college although 34% would like more computers in computer rooms  Only 52% of students said they had file storage and back-up facilities | * FE students are still very dependent on fixed computing provision. Let them know about the options available to them, eg library, bookable pods, etc * Many student complaints are about computer rooms – not enough, not bookable, not quiet, not clean, not up to date, not enough variety (eg all open plan) * Students also complain about subject specialist software being confined to a small number of stations, which quickly get booked out. * Work with IT services to gather student views - some small improvements could make a real difference.  Students are also concerned about the costs of printing, so it’s worth explaining what’s available. * Make sure students know how to safely transfer and back up files | The college provides a wide range of fixed computing options to support your studies…  You will have your own personal file store that you can access from everywhere you like to study.  Printing is taken care of too… *(add details)* |
| Only seven out of ten students said they had access to **reliable wifi** whenever they needed it. Wifi was overwhelmingly the most common issue that FE students asked to be improved | * You probably can’t influence connectivity directly but you can gather evidence from students about how it impacts on their learning * When students don’t have reliable wifi they have to pay for connectivity via their mobile network. This additional cost is a real pain point for some students | You can access our broadband network…  You can also access mobile networks… |
| Not all FE students had **access to their own social media** whenever they wanted it. Blocked web sites and online services were the second most complained about issue among this group  Only **54%** of students agreed that their **organisation helped them to stay safe online** | * Appropriate strategies for keeping students safe and focused on their studies will depend on their age group. Whatever policies are in place, teaching staff need to be on board so that they can offer appropriate activities to develop students’ digital capabilities, and engage them in positive online behaviours * It becomes harder to justify blocking sites (eg YouTube) if students have a range of strategies for using them to learn | Our policy is to…  We want all our students to have the skills and judgement to deal with an interconnected world. Your course will equip you to make positive use of online resources and services. |
| Most colleges now provide a ‘**virtual learning environment’** or VLE where students can find notes, resources, assignments and discussions relevant to their course. A sizeable number of students access their VLE via a mobile device | * Find out how your VLE is used in practice, and how it is introduced to incoming students * Encourage teaching staff to use its full range of functions in supporting students. * Remember that some students will have used a VLE in school, while others will have no experience learning this way | At our college the virtual learning environment (VLE) is called….  This provides access to all your course resources...  You can log into the VLE at any time of day or night, from anywhere you are studying, on campus or away.  When you arrive you will be given a guided tour. Don’t worry if you’ve never used a VLE before – you will quickly get to know your way around.  Keep a short-cut to the VLE on all your devices and be aware that different lecturers might organise materials differently. Get used to navigating around, using features such as discussion groups and blogs. You may want to download some materials so you can access them offline. |
| **Access to e-books and e-journals** was much lower for FE students than for those in HE | * Students find it especially frustrating when there are too few log-ins or tokens for resources that are essential to their course. Work with students and learning resources staff to find out what the pinch-points are * Work with course teams to provide a range of recommended resources rather than one or two that are required, and devise activities that promote sharing (eg small-group authoring of revision materials for the whole cohort) | Schedule key readings ahead of when you need to hand in work, so you are not competing with other students for the same resource at the same time.  Ask your tutor and learning resources staff for alternatives if a key reading is not available. |
| 61% of FE students in our survey agreed that their college protected their **data privacy** and only about a third knew how their **personal data** was stored and used | * Check the guidance from IT services * Consider how this is communicated to students. Could it be more engaging, actionable, concise? A project for some creative students could be designing an infographic or animation to convey these messages in an engaging way | The college is committed to protecting your data privacy and security. You can read our policy here…  Look for guidance from IT services on keeping your data safe and follow any updates carefully. |
| Less than half of FE students agreed that **teaching rooms** were well adapted for digital ways of working | * Students who are using their own devices complain about a lack of charging points, secure storage, reliable wifi and mobile networks * These and other basic transactional issues - such as clean computer rooms and keyboards - make a big difference to students’ experience and satisfaction overall * Consider how useful information such as the location of charging points can be communicated in an engaging way | The college is improving our network coverage…  Recent adaptations to our learning and teaching spaces include…  Find out where you can charge your devices, and where you can work with them comfortably between classes.  *Location information…* |
| FE students turn to other students and course lecturers for **help with digital issues.** A smaller number look to support staff, friends and family and online resources | * Although support staff are not usually their first port of call, students really value having them as back up and in feedback often requested ‘more’ access to support. * Students often seem unsure where digital support can be found. They may be best served by ensuring a wide range of support staff are tuned in to digital issues * Signpost what’s available, ideally from a single real-world hub or services page * There is evidence that online ‘how-to’ video services such as LinkedIn Learning are well used where they are offered – but they are unlikely to help students lacking more basic digital skills | The university subscribes to an on-demand video service…  You can use this any time to help you with a technical problem or to learn new skills.  If you need more personal support, you can find it from…  There is a student hub where you will find…  e-learning/digital champions are available… |
| Only 31% of students agreed that they were given the chance to be **involved in decisions** about digital services | * Discuss how students are involved and how they could be more involved in decisions about digital services, whether as course reps, digital champions, or through regular feedback online or at physical locations around the college | If you see a chance to have your say, take it. It doesn’t need to take up lots of time – often it’s as simple as filling out a comments card or survey.  Consider becoming a course rep or a digital champion if you really want to make a difference. |

# Theme three: your digital course

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| Headline messages to students: The digital activities you carry out on your course will depend on what you are studying. However, there are some things that help all students to succeed and it’s worth making sure you get the most from these activities. Look out for opportunities to build your digital skills - for lifelong learning and the digital workplace. |

Key stakeholders: students and student representatives including digital champions/ambassadors, course teams, learning support and e-learning   
NB: It may be preferable to use this section and the following one as part of course induction rather than at college level. Many of the messages will make more sense to students in that context. The briefing for teaching staff has more detail for these key stakeholders (briefing available from: [**digitalinsights.jisc.ac.uk/our-service**](https://digitalinsights.jisc.ac.uk/our-service/our-reports/)).

## Findings and guidance

| Survey finding | Considerations for your organisation | Draft messages for students (amend to suit your organisation) |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 41% of all FE students agree that they **rely on the VLE** to do their coursework. Students can become frustrated when they can’t easily find resources and when the VLE is used inconsistently | * As students rely more on virtual access to learning, they expect the virtual environment to be designed with their needs in mind. Timely upload of materials, and navigable course structures, are top of their list. * Make sure teaching staff have clear guidelines about what works, ideally with student input, and consult with teaching staff themselves about what would make the VLE easier for them to use well | On this course, we use the college Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) (*name*) to…  You will find… (*explain what they can expect and how it will support them).*  Speak to your course tutor or learning support if you have difficulty accessing the materials you need to study. |
| Around half of FE students regularly **look online for** **resources** beyond those recommended by their lecturers. One in ten said Google search was their favourite tool for learning | * Students who look beyond their reading list are at an advantage in their assignments – but only if they use credible and legitimate sources. Work with the learning support/learning resources teams to make sure arriving students get an early introduction to information skills, with meaningful tasks to embed the learning. * However, this is not enough – many FE students requested support to develop these skills throughout their course. | Our learning support team has tutorials and resources to help you make the best use of online resources.  Course tutors will help you find and reference appropriate content for your subject area. (*Links*)  Reference management and bookmarking are good practices that help you to keep track of useful resources across your assignments and courses.  Always ask your course tutor if you’re not sure which resources are OK to use and why. |
| Many students are expected to **produce work in digital formats***.* Text documents and presentation slides are the most common | * Writing a PowerPoint presentation is a common learning task but there are more interesting ways to get students using their digital skills. How about making an animation or producing an app? * Students can play to their different strengths and learn skills from one another if they can use different media to meet their learning outcomes | There are many ways you might be asked to showcase what you can do. Don’t be afraid to try new things: writing a web page or blog post, creating a short video or animation, or designing an app.  Try different software for making presentations.  Look out for opportunities to develop and show off your creativity in the tasks you are set.  These are all useful skills for work. |
| Nearly a third of students **never work online** with others as part of their course. Many jobs involve collaborative work in digital spaces for activities like group work, focused discussions, collaborative writing or peer review. Being able to communicate online is a valuable skill to have. | * Consider why group work might be valuable to your students and how it could be included * Look into whether students could collaborate on a project with students in other colleges, or with people working in their subject area * VLE functions can often support different kinds of group activity and extend conversations beyond the classroom * Some people find it harder than others to feel connected through digital media. Make sure new students have opportunities to work together, form connections as a cohort, and meet their lecturers * Many people find it easier to make a good connection face-to-face and only then to connect digitally (eg by email or discussion forum) | Embrace the opportunity to work in groups – it is part of the modern workplace.  *Include here any information about group work and group assessments on the course.* |
| Not all students get the chance to **create a digital record or e-portfolio** of their work, these can be helpful in showcasing achievements to future employers | * Find out whether the college supports an e-portfolio, and how different course teams are using it with their students. Alternatives might be a digital learning record, online curriculum vitae (CV) or access to a professional network such as LinkedIn * Work with your employability team to find examples of good practice | Ask your tutor if you can present your work in ways that can be shown or shared outside of your college or exported to your own social media. That way you will have more than a grade to show for the work you have put in.  *Include here information on any e-portfolios, CVs or student web pages that are provided by the college.* |
| It is increasingly common for **polling and quizzing** to be used in classes, either with special ‘clickers’ or with students’ own devices. Students really enjoy this approach | * Find out what systems are in use and how teachers are using them – to check students’ understanding before and/or after a class; to teach adaptively; to engage students; to explore a range of different views; as a way of structuring buzz groups (groups can vote on a solution to a problem) * Some teachers set live internet tasks and then poll students on the results | Polling responses are anonymous and can’t be used for assessment, so you don’t need worry about getting things wrong. Different lecturers might use them in different ways – to check your understanding, find out your views, or encourage discussion.  *Include here any information about how polling is used at the college.* |
| We asked students what **other activities** they found really useful for learning. They talked about designing (eg with Adobe tools), testing themselves with quizzes, playing games and live internet searches. Examples students cited include:  *“Using Sway makes creating a digital portfolio simple and effective.”*  *“Watching historical archive footage and documentaries or reading the news in business classes enables us to be really up to date in discussion, to the minute!”*  *“Online quizzes like Kahoot! ... when used as part of a class it helps to test your knowledge in under a minute and shows you what you need to learn.”* | * A varied diet of digital learning tasks keeps students motivated and allows them to explore different strengths * Ideally they also reflect contemporary workplace practices. Consult our full report for more ideas * When setting new tasks, consider whether digital skills will be explicitly assessed and whether feedback on these will be given   Examples of activities that students found useful are available in the [**appendices**](http://repository.jisc.ac.uk/7672/1/32323h2_JISC_DEI_StudentReport19_A4_Appendix123_HR_Web.pdf) that accompany the full 2018-19 student digital experiences insight report) | Look out for these in class or try them in your own study time. Not everything will suit you, but college is a good time to experiment with different ways to learn. |
| About half of FE students agreed that the **software used on their course** was industry standard and up to date  Students would like course software to be available on their own desktops and devices for practice outside of class | * In some subjects the currency of software really matters, and students want to know that they can transfer their skills directly into workplace practices. In others the underlying skills (eg data analysis) are more important. This may need to be explained * Check that students can run specialist course software on the hardware available to them – or if this is not possible, that they can book time on computers with the key applications * Offer advice on how to find free or low-cost software they can install on their own systems | Use every opportunity to practice skills that will be relevant in your future career. In work you will be expected to adapt to the systems available and adopt new ones regularly.  *Include details of the software available as part of the course experience and any software recommended to students.*  *Explain how students get access to any software with limited licenses, for example, through a booking system.* |
| Most students agreed that **online assessments** were delivered and managed well | * Students experience more anxiety around assessment than any other issue and as a consequence it can have a negative impact on their experience. Make sure students fully understand how they will be assessed and have opportunities to practice with any online submission or exam systems * Prioritise timely feedback in a format that students will be able to keep and review later | Make sure you understand how assignments are submitted online before you reach any critical deadlines.  *Include details of any online assessment systems and plagiarism detection.*  *Explain how students can use feedback and plagiarism reports to improve their work.* |
| In our survey, half of FE students agreed **digital skills** would definitely be important in their chosen career, though workplace trends suggest the figure is actually higher  Only around four in ten students agreed that their course was preparing them for the digital workplace  Only about a third of students agreed that they were told what **digital skills** they would need before their course started, and only about four in ten were given regular opportunities to review and update them  Our analysis found that many of these issues are important in terms of student satisfaction with their overall digital experience | * ‘My digital development’ – a factor made up of these questions around digital skills – were important in terms of the impact on students’ overall digital experience. This means that students’ digital skills should be a consideration for all course teams * Teachers should also have opportunities to develop their skills and to discuss how digital technologies are changing subject areas, vocations, professions and careers. They should know where to direct learners to for further support if they need it * Engage with the employability service or directly with employers to understand the skills that are required and to develop opportunities such as digital work placements and real-world digital projects | Don’t miss out on opportunities to develop digital skills, whether they arise on your course or outside of it.  *Explain how the course will prepare students for digital ways of working.*  *Explain what is on offer additionally from the employability service.*  The college also offers you… *(mention specific digital training and development opportunities*) |

# Theme four: your digital views

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| Headline messages to students: All students have their own strengths and preferences in learning. Your taught sessions, assignments and independent study should offer a variety of approaches, so you can develop different strategies and find your strengths. Be willing to try new things, but let your tutors know if you’re not getting what you need. Get involved in decisions about your digital learning if you have the chance. |

Key stakeholders: students and student representatives including digital champions/ambassadors, course teams, learning support and e-learning   
NB: It may be preferable to use this section and the previous one as part of course induction rather than at college level. Many of the messages will make more sense to students in that context. Our briefing for teaching staff has more detail for these key stakeholders (briefing available from: [**digitalinsights.jisc.ac.uk/our-service**](https://digitalinsights.jisc.ac.uk/our-service/our-reports/)).

## Findings and guidance

| Survey finding | Considerations for your organisation | Draft messages for students (amend to suit your organisation) |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Independence and flexibility** are benefits that FE students appreciate when using digital technologies  Sizeable numbers of students agreed that they feel more **independent**, can more easily fit learning into their life, enjoy learning more and understand things better when digital technologies are used | * Make sure the use of digital technologies on course takes advantage of these known benefits and communicate them to students * Encourage the use of apps to manage their time and tasks, notes and files, key references and readings * Ask students which tasks they enjoy and which they feel have helped them most. Read around your subject area for ideas about engaging students and about teaching threshold concepts with digital input * Be prepared for a variety of responses from students when introducing new methods. It helps if you acknowledge this and ask for feedback afterwards. This gives them a chance to share positive strategies as well as airing any problems | Use digital apps to organise your study time and to-do lists, or link your course timetable with your personal calendar.  Make sure you can access all the software and resources you need to study away from campus, for example, by downloading materials when you have access to the network to work on when access is not available. |
| Most students also felt that their **understanding and enjoyment** were greater when they had the opportunity to use digital tools and media |  | Experiment with learning formats and resource types until you find what works for you.  Engage your creative side by producing digital posters, presentations, web pages and other media when you get the chance.  Explore digital simulations, interactive media and games – or try language learning or brain training apps if you enjoy them.  Ask other students what makes their study time fun and effective. |
| A majority of FE students said they preferred a mix of **group and individual work** but a sizeable minority – more than a third – preferred to work independently | * As well as using digital resources to support independent working –this is something that students find a genuine benefit - explain why group work can be beneficial * Have students tackle group tasks that clearly benefit their own learning, such as sharing bookmarks, setting up an online forum to comment on each other’s work, producing revision materials for one another, or looking at how other students have tackled a problem. | Think about how other students could be a resource for your learning. Collaborative working is the norm in most workplaces, and job candidates will often be tested on how they perform on collaborative tasks, so it’s worth finding out how to get the most out of them while you are at college.  Online group work lets you find other people to study with whom you might not meet in college.  *(Add in any policy and resources on collaborative working)* |
| Over half of FE students were happy with the level of **technology-supported learning** on their course, and most of the rest wanted digital technologies to be used more. Students had many innovative and insightful suggestions for how their course could use digital technologies more effectively | * Give students the chance to say for themselves what they want from digital learning and give them responsibility for trying out alternative ideas (if they are not costly or difficult to implement) * You can use our full report to explore some of the student ideas put forward, but there is no substitute for listening to your own students | We are using the Jisc digital experience insights service to find out how students feel and put your best ideas into practice.  Join in the discussion by… |