Toolkit to benchmark the online learner experience

Further education (FE) version

**Jisc data analytics**

**August 2021**

# Benchmarking the online learner experience: further education (FE) version

## About the online learning benchmark toolkit

The benchmark toolkit has been developed by Jisc with the support of learners and college staff. It helps colleges to assess how they are doing on the key issues that are important to the online learning experience. The issues cover four areas:

Access to online learning

The online learning environment

Learning, teaching and assessment

Wellbeing online

In each area we have developed some ‘good practice principles’ (rows across). You will find examples of how colleges at different stages of development are living up to these principles. Reading from left to right across each row, the columns represent advancing practice:

**First steps** – there are some examples of good practice

**Developing** – there us consistency in good practice across the college

**Developed** – good practice is flexible to meet the needs of different learners and courses

**Outstanding** – ‘developed’ plus learners have individual choices and are involved in decision making (eg through student reps, student panels etc)

### Using the toolkit

Groups of staff and learners can use this toolkit in several ways:

Identify and describe good practice in order to share it more widely

Plan and prioritise further developments

Compare the online experience for different learner groups, or (by arrangement) with other colleges

Track changes over time

Focus on areas of current concern

Use with the Jisc [digital experience insights](https://www.jisc.ac.uk/digital-experience-insights) surveys: the four areas of development map onto the four question themes in the surveys, and can be used to plan focus groups or to respond to the findings

Use with the Jisc [digital elevation model](https://repository.jisc.ac.uk/8108/1/jisc-further-education-and-skills-strategy-2020-2023.pdf) (DEM) for FE: [Numbers in square brackets] map the principles to themes in the DEM

If we have learned anything from the Covid-19 pandemic and online response, it’s that there are no hard-and-fast rules about how online learning should develop. Colleges are different and diverse.

Why not download a version and tailor it to your own college needs? For each area of good practice, you could ask: What apps and platforms are available to support this in your college? How are support services organised and how do students access them? What online learning workshops and guides are available that could be linked here? You can also create new principles (rows) to meet your own college needs. But see if your ideas can be included within an existing principle first: this helps to keep the format shareable.

## Access to online learning

| Good practice principle | First steps: accessible to all | Developing: consistent | Developed: flexible and adaptable | Outstanding: student led |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| You can access online learning when and where you need it [19] [71] | * Learners have good access to networks and services on site
* Instructions for joining networks and apps are easy to follow (eg QR codes)
* Devices are available for learners to use on site when they need them
 | * Learners have good access to online classes and materials, on or off site, using any device
* Devices are available for learners to borrow and use away from the site
 | * Support for learners using mobile devices or with low connectivity (eg materials are available for different screen sizes, can be downloaded for use offline)
 | * Learners are consulted and involved in improving access
 |
| You have the right skills to learn online [21] [24] | * All learners have an induction in how to use online tools and resources for learning
* Learners can access skills modules and how-to resources at any time
 | * Learners have support for a range of online learning skills (eg note-taking, online research, managing deadlines)
* Personal and targeted support is available including in groups and one-to-one
 | * Learners have a personal assessment and a plan to improve their online learning skills
* Online learning skills are embedded into teaching
* Learners can access apps in advance, meet other learners and get ready for learning through taster sessions
 | * Learners can assess their own needs and support each other with their online skills
 |
| Online learning is accessible and inclusive [18] | * Learning apps and resources are checked for accessibility
* Learners have assistive apps and adaptations if they need them (eg speech to text, immersive reading)
* Learners know how to behave safely and responsibly online
 | * Accessibility features are known by all students (whether or not they have an identified need)
* Courses and assessments are designed to be inclusive
* Learning apps can be accessed by students with different devices (eg tools work in browser as well as on desktop)
 | * Learners have a personal assessment and can access assistive features when and where they need them
* Learners are assessed in a variety of ways to showcase their strengths
 | * Learners with different preferences, backgrounds and needs are involved in consultations about online learning
 |

## Online learning environment

| Good practice principle | First steps: accessible to all | Developing: consistent | Developed: flexible and adaptable | Outstanding: student led |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| The online learning environment is consistent and easy to use [26] | * Learning apps and platforms are safe and secure
* Learners can find everything they need from one access point
* Work can be downloaded and followed offline, to support learners with poor connections
 | * Learning apps are used consistently by teachers (eg same features, same lay-out of resources)
* Learning resources are easy to follow and activities are clearly explained
* Learners have a clear schedule of activities and deadlines, including independent learning time
 | * Learners use a range of different apps depending on their course and preferences
* Learners can access and use course software on their own devices
 | * Learners can recommend learning apps, and have their say about the apps used in college
 |
| Online and on site learning are planned to work together [40 [79-81] | * Learners have on site study spaces where they can access online learning
* Learners have a range of online and on site sessions depending on their course
* Learners can access learning resources and personal files across sites (eg using cloud storage)
 | * Different modes of learning (online, on site, live and independent) are planned to give a coherent experience
* Teachers explain learning modes and objectives, and support learners to achieve their best
 | * Learners can easily find and use digital resources on site (eg smart learning spaces, printers, device charging)
* Learners preferences about how and where they learn are supported wherever possible (eg informal spaces available online and on site)
 | * Learners can use their own devices and apps easily alongside those used in college
 |
| You can access information and support online [27] [28] [75] | * Learners can access an IT help desk remotely
 | * Learners have personalised access to key data (eg timetable, target setting, progress and attendance data)
 | * Learners can get support in the ways they prefer (eg chat, video)
* Tutors know how to support online learning and can signpost learners to any additional support they need
 | * Learners are supporting each other (eg digital ambassadors, group projects) and are consulted about the support they need
 |
| You have clear, consistent communication about your online learning [26] [28] | * Learners have clear and easy-to-follow messages about their online learning
 | * Updates and reminders are sent to learners’ devices
* Learners are told what response times they can expect from tutors
 | * Messages are personalised and learners can choose how they get them (eg text, email)
* Learners can track their individual progress
* Learners can be in touch with tutors and each other through their learning apps, in relation to the work they are doing
 | * Staff and learners work together to design messages on key issues
 |

## Online learning, teaching and assessment

| Good practice principle | First steps: accessible to all | Developing: consistent | Developed: flexible and adaptable | Outstanding: student led |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Your online teaching is of a high quality [40] [42] [43] | * Teaching staff use apps and online systems well
 | * Learners do a variety of activities online, including quizzes, polls and group tasks
* The same learning is covered online as it would be in a classroom – even if it is covered differently
 | * The same or equivalent learning experiences are offered online (eg virtual labs, field work, projects, placements)
 | * Learners have input into how online classes are designed and run
 |
| Your online learning resources are of a high quality [39] [49-53] | * Learners can access all their learning resources in one place
* Learning resources are well designed, clear and easy to use
* e-books are widely available for core topics and courses
 | * Learning resources are available when learners need them eg uploaded well ahead of classes
* A range of interactive resources is available including quizzes, tutorials, and (where relevant) virtual and augmented content
 | * Resources are available in different formats, offering learners choices
* Resources are industry standard and work relevant
 | * Learners can find, organise and share learning resources in their own right
 |
| You can interact with tutors and other learners online | * All learners have a personal learning tutor they can contact online, and get a timely response
 | * Lecturers make online sessions interactive eg with discussions, with live tasks, question and answer sessions and feedback
* Lecturers make it clear how students can ask questions about anything that is concerning them
 | * Learners can interact online in a range of different ways with lecturers and other learners (eg chat, video, audio, email, virtual learning environment (VLE), social media channels, different group activities)
 | * Learners have their own online spaces for informal support, and a peer mentoring scheme
* External speakers, experts, alumni and stakeholders are available online to inspire and provide support
 |
| Your online assessments and feedback help you to progress [29] [30] | * Assignments and tests are easy to submit through a familiar app or portal
* Online assignments and tests are fair with access arrangements and mitigations for learners who need them
* All learners have a digital learning plan that evolves as they progress
 | * Feedback is given in a consistent way with clear points for how to improve
* Learners can access formative quizzes and practice tests in all their subjects, some with automatic feedback so they don’t have to wait for tutor grades
 | * Learners can be assessed on all aspects of their work (eg practicals, placements)
* Different assessment types are offered (where available) so all learners can show their best work
* Learners can get feedback in ways that suit them (eg audio)
 | * Learners can build an online progress record or portfolio that they manage for themselves
 |
| Online learning gives you skills for the next stage in your journey [32] [54] [58] | * Learners (and parents/guardians) can access online advice and guidance for UCAS, employment, careers, life skills and apprenticeships
 | * Learners can connect with and get feedback from a tutor online
* Learners are gaining skills for lifelong learning through the work they do on their course
* Learners are beginning to manage their own online identities
 | * Learners can practice with digital tools used in the workplace
* Learner data is used to match learners to appropriate placements/work experience
* Learners keep a record of the digital skills they develop and can get accreditation for some (eg badges)
 | * Learners have a developed online identity they manage for themselves
* Learners can connect online with alumni and are building online networks and contacts for the next stage in their journey
 |

## Wellbeing online

| Good practice principle | First steps: accessible to all | Developing: consistent | Developed: flexible and adaptable | Outstanding: student led |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| You can get support for your wellbeing online [24] [57] | * Learners are aware of online support services and how to connect with them
* Learners know how to report any online situation that is unsafe or makes them uncomfortable
 | * Mental and physical health services are available online to all
 | * Learners are signposted to a range of different services, responsive to their situation and needs
 | * Learners with different needs are involved ini designing online wellbeing services
 |
| Your wellbeing is important to your teachers | * Clear expectations and schedules help learners to manage stress
* Learners can choose how they appear online (name, pronoun, camera on/off)
 | * Online lessons are consistently welcoming and positive
* Teachers take time to build caring and supportive relationships online
 | * Teachers take time to build a sense of belonging among student groups online
* There are safe online spaces for learners to connect informally and share support
 | * Learners are proactive in using the digital environment to support each other, on course, and in general
 |