Digital Student Consultation: Final Report

Report of the consultation process for the Jisc-funded study *Students' expectations and experiences of the digital environment*, January – August 2014

Aims and briefing

Following their delivery of the Jisc-funded study Students' Experiences and Expectations of the Digital Environment in HE (the main deliverable of phase 1 of the Digital Student study) the research team were asked to:

- Communicate phase 1 outcomes at a variety of sector events and conferences
- Design and undertake consultation activities with sector stakeholders to refine and operationalise outcomes from phase 1 and to inform phase 2 developments
- Produce consultation materials to accompany the workshops, and reference materials for participants to use for their own institutions
- Offer expert advice on methodology, research questions and analysis to underpin the study of the digital student experience in FE and Skills
- Undertake a new study of the expectations of school leavers, including desk research and two focus groups
- Provide input into strategic sector initiatives relating to the student experience, e.g. the proposed new UCISA digital capabilities survey and the NSS review
- Identify key problems and make recommendations as to possible solutions, both for institutions and for Jisc and its partners

Outcomes: communication/consultation events

Twelve events were planned and facilitated. Organisation and management of the events was carried out by the Jisc team. The events were:

1) Student consultation at the Jisc Change Agents Network event, Winchester, 19 February
2) Opening consultation event, London, 4 March
3) Jisc Digifest, Birmingham, 12 March
4) ELESIG event, Bristol, 26 March
5) ALT Webinar, online, 1 April April
6) AUDE/SCHOMS/UCISA event, London, 21 May
7) HELF event, Leeds, 22 May
8) Jisc in partnership with RSC Scotland consultation event, Glasgow, 10 June
9) Jisc Learning and Teaching Experts' meeting, Bristol, 24 June
10) HEA Annual Conference, Birmingham, 3 July
11) Academic Practice and Technology Conference, Greenwich, 8 July
12) Final consultation event, Birmingham, 16 July

In addition to Jisc, the following bodies co-hosted or formally participated in at least one event:

- Association for Learning Technology (ALT)
- Association of University Directors of Estates (AUDE)
- e-Learners' Experiences Special Interest Group (ELESIG)
- Higher Education Academy (HEA)
- Jisc Change Agents Network
- Heads of e-Learning Forum (HELF)
- National Union of Students (NUS)
- Jisc Regional Support Centres (RSCs)
- Russell Group of IT Directors (RUGIT)
- Standing Conference of Heads of Media Services (SCHOMS)
- Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL)
- University and College Information Systems Association (UCISA)
- University of Greenwich
- Glasgow Caledonian University

Audience and impact of events

Over 500 members of staff and over 100 students participated in these events. Participation was weighted towards directors and heads of service, e.g. Heads of e-Learning, Directors of Library, Heads of IS/IT Services, PVCs.

Feedback from events was positive: where formal feedback was collected, respondents all agreed that the aims of the day (as stated) had been fully or mostly met.

Comments included:

- *This was a very interesting and stimulating event, with excellent facilitators and thought-provoking activities. It has given me the drive and motivation to follow up quite a substantial piece of work, and the resources and data to support this.*
- *The insights gained from JISC's research were incredibly useful.*
- *I found the whole day enjoyable - it moved well through the agenda. Very positive experience.*
- *First of all can I say thank you ... for another really useful workshop. I certainly got a lot from it and we plan to use many of your resources as part of the [named university] curriculum change programme.*

Participants particularly valued opportunities to: hear about and discuss the findings of the study; share ideas and approaches with colleagues from other institutions and services.

- *'There were people from all sectors involved in education, so there were a lot of different points of view.'*
- *'The consideration of the digital student in its broadest context, rather than in the much narrower or perhaps siloed settings that I usually deal with it.'*
- *'Key findings about aspects of student engagement that we thought were true but are now proven with empirical evidence.'*

Outcomes: materials and communications

Item	Audience and impact
Final version of report from the initial study (Executive summary and full version online)	648 views on Digital Student blog 176 downloads via Jisc web site
Schools study report: Incoming students' expectations of the digital environment in HE.	Awaiting statistics for download (only uploaded in last few days of the project)
12 events with over 500 participants in total	Sides from the events, with recordings where available Uploaded slides have received between 82 (lowest) and 1610 (highest) views
Guidelines for institutions in six key areas	Validated and refined at the final consultation event: positive feedback
28 posts on dedicated Digital Student blog with reports and outcomes of events	54 approved comments Site has received over 700 unique views Most popular posts have received 137 and 161 unique views (as of August 2014)
Post about the project on the Jisc blog Post about the schools report on the Jisc blog	Both blog posts widely tweeted and referenced. One or other of the two posts was 'most read' on the Jisc blog between June-September 2014
Article for ALT newsletter A supportive environment for digital literacy development	Circulated to 132 subscribers; additionally viewed 90 times by non-subscribers (source: Google analytics)
Four conference workshops/papers	Slides from HEA workshop (July 2014) (over 40 participants) Slides from APT (Greenwich) workshop (July 2014) (around 20 participants) Slides from ALT-C workshop (September 2014) (over 50 participants) Slides from ALT-C 'schools' paper (September 2014) (?? participants)
'Listen to students' – posters for comment and reuse.	2 copies printed, available at all 12 events Favourable feedback by email and requests for high resolution versions to use, e.g.: *I have downloaded 'Listen to students' posters and will put in our digital resources (with relevant acknowledgement, of course)'. Thank you.* *I was wondering if it would be possible to have a copy of the 'Listen to Students' posters you*

	showed us at the Jisc DigiFest? I feel they have very important points that I would like to share within the organisation *Thank you for a very interesting session at digifest14 about understanding students' expectations and experiences. I would like to put the Listen to students posters up around our TEL room and the staff room … Can you supply the high res versions?* *[A member of ALT] was running the session before mine and was making extensive use of the posters to help frame the discussion. It's a great example of the impact the project is having.*
'Enhancing the digital student experience' – cards for comment and reuse	Available at all 12 events 500 sets printed and distributed Favourable feedback by email and on feedback forms, e.g. at one event all respondents to the request for feedback said that they would use materials from the event, and more than half of those said that they would use the cards: *The take-away cards are good* *Cards [will be useful] to prompt discussions* *'How to manage student expectations' cards ... to start an internal discussion'*
'Digital experiences in the curriculum' – cards for a variety of staff development activities	Available online Favourable feedback from 3 workshops with iterative refinement
'Five postcards from the future' – cards for organisational development	Available online Used at ALT-C workshop with positive outcomes and feedback
Edited video from original study: • 6 edited and captioned interviews, ranging from 6 to around 13 minutes in length • 1 edited and captioned compilation, 8 minutes in length, including highlights from the 6 interviews • 34 edited and captioned clips, ranging from 30 seconds to 1 minute 30 seconds, derived from the edited interviews • specification to infonet for a video 'wall' to distribute these materials	Used at consultation events and by Jisc speakers at other events Compilation video available on youtube (18 views)

Video footage from consultation events: • 9 edited interviews from opening event, March 2014 • Interview (Dave White and Helen Beetham) from the ELESIG symposium, March 2014 • full presentation (Helen Beetham) from Jisc Learning and Teaching Experts' meeting, May 2014 • 7 captioned clips from closing event, July 2014	
Wide range of still photographs from 12 events	Included in blog posts and tweets
Communications with NSS review team recommending specific changes to questions about the student digital experience	Report citing our work suggests changes to question set reflecting our advice: see pp35-36, notes #40-42
Substantive work on the new UCISA biannual 'digital capabilities' survey	New survey available 1 August 2014
Input to FE and Skills study wrt methods and materials	Materials for focus groups (sent 13 June 2014) Blog posts (support given June-August 2014) Contribution to meeting 10 July 2014
Ideas collected from participants about 'what one thing' institutions should do to enhance the student digital experience	Padlet Outcomes of 'what one thing?' exercise at final consultation event Outcomes of 'what one thing?' at Alt-C
Multiple exchanges and amplification of events via twitter hashtag #digitalstudent.	Up to 150 tweets per day around key events such as the final consultation event (source: topsy.com)

Other impact:

Our input to the NSS review was received with thanks by the review team and fully acknowledged in their report. On receiving the sugggested revisions, the SCONUL executive emailed members to say:

'It feels like the changes do a better job of recognising the different pedagogical uses of technology, rather than lumping them together under the broad 'IT' umbrella. Particularly, making the connection between the library and the digital services it offers seems a positive step for members.'

Our work on the UCISA 'digital capability' survey was strongly praised by the team involved: *'Brilliant... Thanks for your clarity of thought' 'much appreciated'*

Our session for the NUS was well attended and appreciated:

'Thank you so much again for your brilliant session on Monday. The verbal feedback over lunch was all very positive and when asked what the most useful session had been on the feedback form, most delegates said it was yours!' (organiser)

Outcomes: key challenges

From the results of both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Digital Student (HE) study and consultation we conclude that HE institutions face the following challenges:

- Students' expectations of digital provision at university are rising in line with their general experiences in school and through their relationships with other organisations. Universities may not yet be meeting some of these expectations, e.g. robust and ubiquitous network access; support for the use of students' own devices and services on campus; and access to personal learning information (student dashboard).
- Students' early contacts with their chosen institution are likely to be online, and significant parts of the student journey will depend on virtual contacts e.g. during vacations, placements, years abroad and after graduation. Universities are not on the whole doing enough to secure and build students' affiliation through these virtual experiences.
- The experience of signing on to and using university digital systems is not on the whole a rewarding one for students. Universities could do more to involve students in the design of their digital interfaces, and to allow students to express their own identities and preferences when they use university systems.
- Universities are not doing enough to prepare students to study in a digitally rich environment, to challenge students' sometimes conservative expectations about university study, and to persuade students of the value of innovative learning experiences.
- Digital experiences are still not routinely included in every course of study as an entitlement.
- Learning spaces are still not routinely designed or refreshed around the assumption of students using their own devices for study, or around the need to support innovative approaches to teaching.
- Students' digital experiences are strongly dependent on the confidence and capability of teaching staff, yet current workload modelling and career pathways/reward structures can hinder innovative approaches to teaching.
- Students' digital experiences are also formed by student-facing professional staff. These staff typically lack professional standards/frameworks and/or professional development opportunities that take full account of the digital aspects of their work.
- Senior managers are not fully persuaded that the digital student experience is relevant to key institutional goals e.g. graduate outcomes and employability, student satisfaction, student retention and progression, research impact, branding, attracting international students, attracting work-based students and other new markets...
- There are tensions between providing a secure, robust infrastructure - with parity of experience across courses and campuses - and supporting innovation and diversity in digital practice.
- Digital expertise and digital strategy continue to be fragmented in most institutions. For example, student engagement and TEL strategies are rarely linked; helping staff and students to develop their own digital identities is rarely seen as an aspect of

institutional digital branding; there are few direct routes for transferring innovative research practices into learning and teaching.

See also:

- 'ways to fail' – a compilation of 'reverse engineered' ideas on how institutions could fail to respond to these challenges

At two early consultation events we asked delegates to consider the possible consequences to institutions of failing to address these challenges. They included:

- lower student satisfaction, particularly if the new NSS question set is adopted
- lower QAA assessment, particularly if digital capacity is seen as a priority enhancement issue
- some students dropping out, losing interest or failing to progress
- some students failing to secure graduate-level employment
- students not recognising the digital support and services provided for them by the institution
- the institution failing to communicate a strong digital identity/brand or to showcase student and staff achievements in digital spaces
- the institution lacking capacity to respond to emerging challenges, such as those sketched in point 9. above

Outcomes: Institutional solutions

We have developed the following guidance and messages for stakeholders in institutions, refined over all 12 consultation events:

- Prepare and support students to study effectively with technologies
- Deliver a robust, flexible digital environment
- Deliver a relevant digital curriculum (see also ideas for building authentic digital experiences into the curriculum)
- Develop coherent policies for 'bring your own' (devices, services, data)
- Engage in dialogue with students about their digital experience and empower them to develop their digital environment
- Take a strategic, cross-institutional approach to developing the student digital experience for the future

Taking into account our consultation feedback and the additional work we have done on the expectations of incoming students from school, our top recommendations to institutions are:

1. Prepare students to study in digitally-enhanced settings, and explain clearly how digital technologies can support their aspirations
2. Engage students in conversations about their digital practice, and involve them in projects to enhance provision
3. Enable staff to innovate their own practices with technology and to confidently support students
4. Create a physical/virtual environment that supports the use of personal devices, applications, networks and services

5. Integrate digital issues into long-term planning, considering the full life-cycle of current students (prospect to alumnus) and the need to respond to emerging challenges

National solutions (recommendations to co-funding partners)

Building on our recommendations from phase 1, supplemented with feedback from across the stakeholder communities and all 12 events in phase 2, we make the following suggestions to Jisc and co-funding partners. These are ideas put forward by participants to help their institutions respond better to the challenges and to enhance the student digital experience across the sector.

1. Scope the potential to provide a ***national clearinghouse*** for data on student expectations, experiences, attitudes and satisfaction with digital technologies in their studies.

Detail:

- Should cover the potential for both national data management/analysis and support/guidance for institutions to collect, collate, analyse and manage their own student data.
- Horizon scanning could also be scoped i.e. identifying emerging technologies and issues which institutions might want to survey and/or consider when planning for the student digital experience.
- Should consider how best to review, develop and refine survey instruments, including the possibility of offering disaggregated or adaptable instruments for institutions to repurpose.
- Should consider alternative models especially costs/benefits of developing as a service.
- Should consider feasibility of bringing key partners on board and a number of possible partnership models.
- Should involve discussions with NUS alongside their emerging charter on the use of learner data, and look into helping institutions respond to the proposed new questions on digital experience in the NSS.
- Needs to include review of other models internationally (e.g. Educause).

2. Continue to ***communicate the outcomes*** of this study and its relationship with parallel work (e.g. FE and skills study, 'Developing Digital Literacies' programme, Jisc work on learner analytics and digital capabilitites)

Detail:

1. Present at conferences e.g. a. ALT-C, Jisc Student Experiences Online conference, Jisc DigiFest 2015.
2. Participants have responded well to existing resources – posters, postcards, institutional solutions – and are embedding them into ongoing staff and student activities: these could be refined, re-issued, aggregated in new ways, or simply monitored in use.
3. Other communication tools have been requested – and in some cases produced in draft during consultation events – including: an interactive 'student journey', exploratory interactive graphic, visual metaphors, personal quizzes and institutional check-lists.

4. These could potentially be developed and brought together as a single toolkit – see point 3.
5. There has been enthusiasm for further development and dissemination of the six 'institutional solutions' documents – see points 5 and 6.

3. Develop a ***Digital Student toolkit*** as a resource for institutions who are keen to work strategically to enhance students' digital experience.

Details:

- This should be based on the proven resources already piloted in the consultation process.
- Further development will be needed to ensure these resources fit together coherently, are easily reused in different settings, and meet the needs of all institutional players.
- The toolkit could be backed up by further materials produced during a pilot process, i.e. pilot workshops with a small number of 'committed' institutions could be made available on video; the same institutions could provide small-scale case studies.
- Consultants already familiar with this work could cascade skills to other experts via the pilot process, at the same time building expertise, identifying potential consultants or co-mentors to take the process forward, and refining the materials to be used.

4. Run a ***staff/student partnership contest*** using an elevator pitch approach to identify development projects that meet one or more of the challenges identified in the study.

Detail:

- online/web briefing for interested institutions/individuals
- institutions encouraged to run local elevator pitches to identify staff/student projects relevant to their own local challenges
- ideas made available on national elevator
- winners receive modest funding (similar to SOSI) for staff/student time
- projects develop apps/services, some of which will be applicable beyond that institution
- projects provide brief case studies as evidence base for communicating outcomes
- analysis of all ideas to identify which challenges are seen as most pressing or tractable by institutions

5. Further ***develop the 'institutional solutions'*** documents as challenge areas for institutions to address.

Detail:

- Define a student '*entitlement*' around each challenge area, describing the kinds and levels of digital provision required to meet students' expectations and current needs
- Provide an indication of how institutions can '*enhance*' the student experience in these six challenge areas, additional to the entitlement agenda
- Illustrate these enhancements using a short institutional *exemplar* (model solution) based on known institutional case studies and contacts

6. ***Map outcomes of the digital student study*** to other co-design themes and Jisc priorities

Details:

- Stakeholders consistently told us they want Jisc to give institutions clear messages concerning the impact of students' digital experience and the contribution digital approaches can make to student satisfaction, employability and graduate outcomes
- Study outcomes should inform the planning of future Jisc activities, particularly in relation to the challenges of 'Building Digital Capability' and 'Prospect to Alumnus'
- Build on the momentum of the consultation events to raise Jisc's profile and continue to work with partner organisations, including NUS, AGCAS and other co-design partners.