

# Students expectations and experiences of the digital environment

Consultation session with HeLF, Leeds, 22 May 2014

Helen Beetham

## Key ideas

1. Theme for HeLF this year: e-learning at scale. Looking at tensions created by scaling up projects across an institution or looking beyond a single institution.
2. Institutions/services are beginning to understand we need to think about IT from a student perspective. Moving on from providing infrastructure to supporting people working in a mixed environment of personal/institutional technologies.
3. We should be shaping student's expectations not just responding to their expectations, and that conversation needs to be formative/iterative if we are to achieve transformation.
4. *'Are some of the systems we are introducing actually creating a more transmissive culture rather than transformative? e.g. is lecture capture actually drive a very simplistic view of education rather than a transformative one. Learning is hard, it takes hard work, lots of reading, the development of efficient ways of thinking. Any particular technology needs to support this rather than dismantle it.'*
5. *'Good education is about empowerment, this is the true transformational change. What you do with this empowerment whether local or wider, digital or physical, comes from the context.'*
6. What does it mean for students that our universities are semi-permeable institutions? Many are moving from school – clear and heavily policed boundaries - to deliberately blurred/blended environment. One that deliberately fosters public/private, formal/informal spaces ([third spaces](#)) and encourages students to develop a public identity and to showcase their achievements.
7. Usability is not the only measure of educational technologies. Good design is important but professional and scholarly systems are often complicated because the practices they support are complicated. [Generic, frictionless technologies can of course be used for sophisticated interactions, e.g. communication and collaboration services]. This is one unique offer that HE can make to students – enabling them to become proficient in complex technical systems (design, data analysis and management, reference management, mapping, digital media production, digital instruments...)
8. Conversations with students as partners are complex, dynamic, time-consuming. The process may be more important than the outcomes – and the process needs to be clearly beneficial to those involved.

## Suggestions for actions in institutions

1. Work with clubs and societies to support development of students' digital identities. NUS branches spend a lot of time administering forms of proof that students have been engaged in various activities. Open badges could support some of that. We need a pull from NUS on using digital badges to streamline administration and to support students' building graduate awards, CVs and similar.
2. Work with alumni – bring them back in to talk about their experiences – provide CPD opportunities and CV building to keep them engaged.
3. Work with students pre-arrival when they are keen. Look at online pre-induction + partnerships with schools – addressing students' digital skills and expectations before they

arrive. As with alumni, this is an opportunity to have students identify with the university as a community and as a brand – Signing up to institutional systems, gaining access (progressively?) to tools and services, showcasing oneself in a university context must all be a means of identification and identity work, not just administrative chores. [Could badges be used??]

4. Curriculum approval process must ensure authentic digital activities are embedded into the curriculum and digital outcomes explicitly taught, assessed and progressed. This should be built into validation so that curriculum teams have to sit down and think about where these attributes are being addressed. Good examples of how digital activities can meet other curriculum outcomes and educational priorities e.g. inclusivity, sustainability, employability – not just another checklist. Keep the process agile and light weight so curriculum teams can respond to changing requirements.
5. Digital activities in the curriculum should: foster a sense of community and students as contributing to community; provide range of technologies and uses to support repertoire and resilience; give students confidence to try and adopt technologies of their own.
6. Employing students in TEL teams – offers insight into student perspective as well as student-led solutions and effective peer support. [There is a difference between employing students on hourly paid contracts and giving students a bursary to undertake a particular project and be responsible for its outcomes – arguably the latter gives students more ownership and self-direction, and may lead to higher commitment and better outcomes. At some HEIs it is also easier from a payroll perspective.]
7. Look at ways of recognising students' digital achievements e.g. through open badges, graduate awards, living CV, digital traces of learning activity (video, online presentations, animations, reflections, digital storylines, blog posts). Ensure digital achievements are evidenced in the HEAR and/or graduate award alongside degree classification. Students in paid roles should also be given clear routes to evidencing their work.

### **Suggestions for actions at a national level**

1. Connections and influences over the other bodies which are driving the change in universities need to be capitalised, eg QAA, NUS, HEA – partnership approach, working with those who already have influence. NSS is a key driver – and senior managers only really talk to other senior managers so need to be part of those conversations.
2. Case studies on specific themes in meeting student digital expectations and requirements e.g.:
  - ⤴ BYO and repositioning of IT support;
  - ⤴ working with employers on the digital curriculum;
  - ⤴ developing a robust digital environment able to provide both safe/closed and semi-permeable settings for learning;
  - ⤴ rethinking induction and managing arriving students' expectations.
3. (Perhaps associated with this) Guidance on and examples of curriculum development, to embed authentic digital activities, appropriate to subject area and student aspirations. In collaboration with partners, students and employers where appropriate. Generic model with subject-specific examples. [Some [curriculum development resources](#) on the design studio]
4. Institutional models of organisational change: how institutions become effective 'digital universities', linking the digital agenda with a variety of other national drivers, integrating support across services. What are the organisational models?
5. Need national level conversation with professional bodies and employers, as well as guidance on managing these conversations locally. Not just asking employers what they want from graduates today but telling them what they will want in five years – what

technologies, approaches and opportunities are emerging – and ensuring our graduates can offer that. Graduates capable of innovating their own role not just meeting criteria. Graduates that can think globally, spread their brand, innovate technically and socially/economically with technology, use cloud solutions and build/thrive in the kind of semi-permeable organisational environment we will have given them at Uni. *'In a way the drive to meet employer needs is distorting the possibilities of digital technology in HE'*.

6. Big surveys – ensure existing surveys include questions relevant to the digital experience or are monitoring the impact that the digital experience is having on student satisfaction. Potential to design another national survey with UCISA, similar to [TEL](#)? Potentially national-level sharing of data generated locally (might include guidance on writing, running and analysing surveys in ways that produce evidence that can actually be actioned, and can be part of an ongoing conversation with students).
7. There is a digital lens on the UKPSF but we should be working with the HEA to communicate this and help institutions to understand how to use it and what digital capability actually means (i.e. not one-size-fits-all, either for students or for teaching staff). [Link here to [HEA Digital Literacies in the Disciplines](#) project?]
8. We need a good national MOOC on digital literacies/digital student issues – with quality content (students and staff together). Helen Beetham to be lead educator! [← I didn't write that!]
9. Jisc and partners in this project need to engage with research funding bodies [and [Vitae](#)?] to influence their understanding of digital scholarship, and of digital measures of research impact/reach. Would help embed digital literacies via research which is where most academics feel identified.