Enhancing the digital student experience: conversations that count cards

Using the Digital Student cards

These 'Digital Student' cards are designed to support conversations about students' digital experience. As someone who works with students and/or who enables digital change, you know that conversations are critical to making things happen. The cards can provide a prompt to start a conversation, or a tangible reminder you can leave behind. Conversations might arise informally or you could arrange for a group of people with a common area of interest to get together. You could also use the cards as a checklist (how are we doing here?) or a planning tool (what should we prioritise next?) but remember that they are not designed for comparison with other institutions: they are designed to help you think about what is happening and what could happen at your own.

The 'Digital Student' cards were developed as an outcome of the Jisc Digital Student project. They build on findings about students' digital expectations and experiences and on an extensive consultation process with stakeholders in higher and further education. You can find out about the project and explore other resources here: http://digitalstudent.jiscinvolve.org.

When you use these cards you can be confident that the questions have been tested out and that the ideas have been tried in practice: there are more detailed 'good practice' examples on the website. But you will still need to listen and get feedback from people in your own setting to know what is really happening, how well you are meeting students' expectations and needs now, and what you can do to build their digital expertise for the future.

Using the cards

Each of the 14 cards offers one **question,** designed to probe 'how well are we doing?' in various areas of the student digital experience. You can use the cards simply to ask these questions in your institution and listen to the answers, using the indicators as prompts if you need to.

The **indicators** for each question are arranged roughly in the order that we find institutions tend to achieve them, but please bear in mind that every development path will be different. For a more detailed exercise, choose one or more cards (depending on the stakeholders you are talking with) and build a conversation around the indicators, asking for example:

- which of these are we already doing, fully and well, across the institution?
- which are we working on and starting to get right?
- which have we not even started with?

And then you might ask:

- which are really achievable for us?
- which are important but might take more work?
- so what should we prioritise in the next year or three years?

You might also come up with ideas that are not on the card at all.

Finally, the **benefits** on each card are *indicative* statements, paraphrased from interviews and consultations and from our literature reviews. They are not direct quotes, but designed to help you explore what the outcomes might be if you were to put some of these ideas into practice. They are not a substitute for having your own conversations with students, or consulting locally about how different stakeholders see their roles evolving.

1. How are we managing students' expectations of the digital environment?

- There is clear signposting to the person or team responsible for supporting learners with digital technologies.
- Before they arrive, learners know what digital content and services are available and how they can get help with using them effectively.
- Before they arrive, students know what services, systems and hardware are available to them, and what they can/should bring for themselves.
- Before they arrive, students know how digital technologies will be used in their chosen course of study and why they are important.
- Students have opportunities to practice using institutional systems before they arrive.
- We explain and model to students our rules on copyright and plagiarism, and on fair and safe use of IT services.
- We explain and model to students the many legitimate ways that technology can support their learning and prepare them for the workplace.
- Students are involved in discussions about the digital environment and digital provision through representation on user groups and other feedback loops.

Benefits:

Student change agent: 'W*e have all these materials now that we [student digital change agents] have put together for new first years to tell them what to bring, how to get logged on, how to sort themselves out with printing, all of that stuff I just had to work out for myself.'*

Library/information specialist: *'Students are more motivated in the induction sessions because they've heard tutors say that online resources can improve their grades, and they know they're going to have an online research task early on in their coursework.'*

2. How do we prepare students to study in digital settings?

- Before they arrive, students know how digital technologies will be used in their course of study

and how they can best prepare for this (with their own devices, skills and services).
- The induction process includes mandatory training in all the institutional and work related systems students will have to use.
- Identify learners who will need additional support to study in digital settings, assess their access needs and provide targeted solutions.
- Students have training in the safety and ethical issues involved in participating online e.g. privacy, data protection, IPR and copyright, flaming, bullying.
- (Fully or partly) online courses have a tailored induction process to ensure learners are up to speed technically and understand the demands of working independently.
- Early course tasks make use of digital devices/resources and introduce digital ways of working.
- Learners' digital capabilities are assessed and progressed throughout their course of study e.g. using an online journal or e-portfolio to reflect and gather evidence.
- Questionnaires, quizzes or other diagnostic tools help students to understand their own digital needs and preferences: they receive personal feedback and signposting to support.

Benefits:

First year student*: I was worried it was going to be completely different from school but we got a chance to try out the VLE and assessment system before we started.*

Course tutor: *Now that I've sat in on a few sessions that the library put on for them - about referencing online material, and copyright and so on – I feel more confident to give students the right advice going through the course.*

3. How do we give students a sense of belonging to the (digital) institution?

- There is an active pre-induction online community where new students can meet, speak to existing students and staff, take virtual tours, begin building a digital identity.
- Students receive an institutional email address as soon as their place is confirmed.
- Students gain access to institutional systems, digital spaces and messages as soon as their place is confirmed.
- Students can use their own devices/services on campus networks (restrictions are reasonable).
- Students can choose how they receive institutional information and communications on their devices/services.
- Students can use third party services e.g. Google, Dropbox, Facebook, Skype, media sharing sites, seamlessly alongside institutional systems.
- Students have a single point of sign-on to institutional systems, which are easy and intuitive i.e. mirror everyday use of mobile/web services.
- Students have an institutional e-portfolio, learning journal, CV-for-life or other professional identity toolkit they can use throughout their studies and beyond.
- Students have a personal interface (or dashboard) on data about their learning, their course, and their institution – and can access it using their own device.
- Students can personalise their institutional digital spaces and services.

Benefits

Librarian/learning resource manager: *Students can access so many services through Google now, it's really important they understand that we're paying for them to have these full-access journal articles and it's something they won't get outside of the institution.*

First year student: *If there's a room change or you've got an overdue book or anything like that you get a message on your mobile. So there's that reassurance, you know you're not going to be late, or turn up in the wrong place.*

4. How good is the access we offer to hardware and networks?

- We provide reliable, robust digital services (e.g. classroom IT that works, core systems without downtime, up-to-date hardware)
- Learners have free access to computers and printers, even if the majority are using their own devices.
- Institutional machines can safely be used by students to access personal resources and services: this access is not unreasonably restricted.
- There is reliable, robust wifi in all the places students use for work (including social spaces) and in halls of residence.
- There is a five-year (at least) strategy for investing in/upgrading networks and hardware to meet changing needs.
- Students have access to relevant hardware for their courses of study including for specialised use in lab, field, studio and professional settings.
- Loan and/or preferential purchase schemes are available to provide a level playing field where digital technologies are critical to study.
- Learning spaces are designed to support the use of learner-owned devices e.g. multiple sockets, desk space, flexible furniture, secure storage, plug-and-play screens.
- Wifi printing is enabled in at least some locations: students can print from their own devices on campus.
- There is (emerging) parity of digital provision across departments and distributed campuses e.g. with loan schemes universally available to redress disadvantage.

Benefits:

Education student: *I was so delighted to find out I was getting an ipad for my own use. It's not just helping me in my studies but it means I can try out new things when I get out into the classroom.*

International student: *Being able to Skype home was so important for me to feel settled in, and there was just no problem getting online at all, it was there straight away.*

5. How good is the access we offer to software and services?

- Students know what is available for their use and recognise the digital services provided by the institution, e.g. library subscriptions and databases

- Students have access to generic tools e.g. email, browser, productivity software (e.g. Office), presentation software, reference management, online discussion spaces, timetable and calendar, file management.
- Students have seamless access to course content, both internal (lecture notes, journal subscriptions, e-books etc) and guided access to external content.
- Students are not unreasonably restricted in their use of personal and social digital services, apps, cloud applications and networks.
- Students have access to specialist software and systems, licenses and access agreements relevant to their workplace and course of study.
- Students have industry-standard software and systems to learn on, where relevant.
- Students have access to modern, accessible, reusable digital resources (e.g. screen casts, virtual labs, animations e-tutorials)
- There are up-to-date recommendations to students on third-party educational software, services and apps to support their studies (especially low-cost/free).
- Students are involved in regular review of institutional systems to ensure they are meeting their needs for ease-of-use, functionality, and interface design.

Benefits:

Design student: *It's very important to me that we're learning on the latest versions, otherwise you'd have to start paying for courses to get you up to speed before you could even look for a job.*

Graduate student: *'We would tend to share apps and web sites we use, usually the free ones or with a thirty-day trial offer – no-one can afford to buy software when you're a student.'*

6. How effective is our guidance and support for students' use of digital technologies?

- Students receive a full induction into the use of all institutional systems e.g. VLE, assessment system, registration, library catalogue.
- Ongoing digital literacy development is provided throughout their time at college
- Students receive training in information skills e.g. searching, evaluating and managing online content, note-taking, referencing, sharing, avoiding plagiarism.
- Basic IT skills training is available on a drop-in basis, e.g. searching, browsing, use of email, keyboard/mouse/touchscreen operations, use of productivity software.
- Sources of guidance and support are clearly signposted to learners and equally available across departments and campuses.
- A video database or subscription to a how-to video service (e.g. Lynda.com) is available so students can access support in a medium they find easy to learn from.
- There is a dedicated adviser on assistive technology and a ring fenced budget for AT.
- Students have advice (e.g. from careers/employability) on building a digital identity/profile/footprint and positive strategies for online networking/job hunting.
- Students have advice (e.g. from learning support/academic development) on apps for writing, presenting, note-taking, collating and organising, time and task management etc
- Students can pick up digital skills from each another via e.g. course of study (groupwork), digital

champions/mentors, social media support groups, open plan spaces.
- Guidance and support are integrated into courses of study so students are continually exposed to new digital practices and learn to be confident with them.

Benefits

Graduate Teaching Assistant*: 'I don't spend so much time on the basics because I know I can refer them to workshops and online tutorials if they need it, so I can focus on getting them immersed in the subject.'*

Learning support staff: *'The whole team is up to speed with apps and services now – things like Evernote and Zotero - so we can help students use these things confidently'*

7. How are we supporting students to use their own devices and services?

- Students can access personal/social digital services, software, apps and data via institutional networks.
- Institutional systems can be accessed on a range of platforms including mobile.
- There is sufficient desk space, secure storage, plug sockets, and a variety of suitable areas for learners working alone and in groups (e.g. with plug-and-play screens).
- Students have ongoing drop-in/help-desk support for using their own devices, services and content/data.
- There is a clear Bring Your Own policy which supports students to use their own devices, services and content/data appropriately in institutional settings.
- There are a number of supporting policies e.g. Switch it On, loan schemes to redress disadvantage, IT support focused on individuals rather than systems.
- Academic staff are willing to give students control over how they use devices in the classroom and confident initiating/explaining/modelling effective practices.
- Learners are regularly consulted about how they want to use their own devices and services, what they really do with them, and what impact BYO policies have.
- Teaching staff encourage students to use their own devices for learning and make explicit their expectations and standards for how this should be done.

Benefits:

Fieldwork student: *'I just got into the habit of using my phone to take videos. I thought I'd maybe use them for revision but in fact some of them ended up going into my project and being assessed as part of that.'*

Staff member, IT helpdesk: *'The job is more challenging but more interesting – you might not have seen that particular app or tablet before, and you're working with that student to help them get the best out of what they've got.'*

8. How are we embedding digital experiences into the curriculum?

- All courses/modules have a minimum digital requirement e.g. resources available via the VLE.
- Students are signposted to digital networks, resources and opportunities that can extend their learning experience.
- Digital content is available to learners and used by teachers e.g. multimedia resources, e-learning packages, gaming, questions/quizzes.
- Digital technologies are used to enhance face-to-face learning e.g. for polling, presenting, searching, interacting.
- Students carry out online research, work with data, and/or communicate ideas using digital media.
- Students have alternative routes to assessment including in digital media, and examples of digital outcomes that have received good grades.
- Students undertake learning activities that leave a digital footprint e.g. web page, blog post, wiki edit, video, multimedia production, app.
- Learning has been significantly transformed by technologies e.g. is borderless/open, online/blended, uses technology in a 'flipped' classroom.

Benefits

Second year student: *In our group we decided to present our findings as an animation. I'd never done one before so I learned a lot about the technical side, but I think knowing other people would be seeing it and commenting on it really inspired us to make it better.*

External examiner: *Examples of student work are varied and innovative. They reflect the new ethos of the course and show students gaining media skills as well as tackling important issues in the field.*

9. How are we building the digital capabilities of student-facing staff?

- Effective practice is shared via e.g. online case studies, 'show and tell' events, multi-role projects.
- All student-facing staff have access to professional development in using digital technologies e.g. workshops, mentoring.
- Teaching staff have support to embed digital technologies into courses of study with awareness of the educational implications.
- Initial and continuing professional development for teaching staff incorporate digital methods as both subject matter and method of participation/assessment.
- Staff who contribute to digital innovation are celebrated e.g. via special awards, at a conference or other events.
- Staff interest groups and communities of practice are actively supported e.g. around particular devices or software systems, roles or subject areas.
- Digital capabilities are recognised as important learning outcomes/attributes and are explicitly considered in curriculum design and review.
- Digital expertise is included in appraisals, job descriptions etc linked with relevant professional frameworks e.g. UK PSF, HEA fellowship, SCONUL, CMALT.
- There are credible routes to career advancement for digital innovators: flexible workload

modelling and flexible timetabling ensure that innovative approaches are not penalised.

Benefits:

Head of e-Learning: '*Different members of the team need to be interfacing with different services. So now we work with careers around e-portfolios and online identity and we work with disability assist and learning support to make sure students are getting the most out of their devices.'*

New lecturer: '*I'd never even commented on anything online before [the PG-CAP course] – now I've just uploaded a video piece to my academic blog and I'm thinking about how I could get my placement students to do something similar.'*

10. How are we preparing students for digital workplaces?

- In their course, students use professional tools and encounter digital practices relevant to their subject and/or chosen profession/vocation.
- Students receive guidance on professional networking and on finding and applying for jobs online.
- e-portfolio system(s) allow students to curate and showcase their learning achievements.
- Students can also evidence digital activities and skills outside of the curriculum, e.g. through open badges, skills modules, or a graduate award scheme.
- Students build a professional profile or portfolio that they can take on with them into future education, employment etc.
- The curriculum encourages students to develop an online digital identity, contribute to open resources and to share digital artefacts in public spaces.
- Digital technology is used to support learners on placements and in work-based learning.
- Employers are engaged in the digital curriculum as appropriate: e.g. offering internships, sponsoring digital awards, providing online masterclasses and guest lectures.

Benefits

Second year student: *At the end of the module I had something I could show my family and friends that I'd helped to produce, and it was on a real academic website. I've put it onto my LinkedIn profile – it should make me stand out.*

Careers adviser: *The digital branding competition has given us a new way of working with local employers, so our students get a chance to be tested in a real commercial environment and employers get to see what our digital natives can do for their company.*

11. How do we ensure an inclusive learning experience with technology?

- Learners have access to assistive technologies to meet their identified needs, and support to install and use it.
- Information for students and prospective students is accessible on a range of devices/platforms.
- Digital learning content is available on a range of devices/platforms.
- Where possible, course activities can be undertaken using devices, software and services chosen by students.
- Guidelines on accessibility and inclusivity are applied to the development of all learning content and the design of all learning opportunities.
- Different groups of learners are represented in discussions and decisions about digital provision.
- Digital technologies are used to deliver on strategic commitments to an inclusive, equitable and/or an international/inter-cultural learning experience.
- Technology-related investments and policies are examined for their potential impact on widening participation, inclusivity, equality of outcome.

Benefits:

Institutional strategy: *We are proud that we offer an inclusive educational experience, using the best in current technologies to support our learners' individual needs.*

Hard-of-hearing student: '*Once I explained the problem, the lecturer did start putting up all the notes before the session, and they even got some of the [video] demos transcribed for me. And after a while other students started saying they found that really helpful too.'*

12. How do we find out more about students' digital experiences and expectations?

- There is a working student representation and/or learner voice system.
- The digital experience is included in measures of student satisfaction.
- Arriving students are surveyed about their previous experiences with digital technology.
- Regular, longitudinal and comparable data collection is undertaken in order to identify trends.
- Students give feedback on their digital experience in a variety of ways: qualitative as well as quantitative (e.g. focus groups, interviews); informal as well as formal (e.g. Padlet, Facebook, vox pops, video booths).
- Learner voice/student rep/student partnership initiatives include training/awareness of digital issues so that representatives can speak on these effectively.
- In courses of study, there are opportunities for students to reflect and give feedback on their digital practices and experiences e.g. in class, in workshops, at assessment.
- Students are involved as partners in developing the digital environment (see separate card).

Benefits:

Head of Student Experience: '*We've added a lot of detail to the picture we were getting through the NSS: now we have a good idea what role IT provision plays in students' feelings about their course, and how they are using ICT generally in their studies.'*

Learner voice rep: *'We set up a Padlet for learners to give their feedback on what they thought about the new system and it was good for them to see staff going on there and actually responding to their ideas'.*

13. How do we engage students in developing the digital environment?

- Students are involved in user groups for relevant systems (IT, library, e-learning, VLE etc).
- Course reps have a good understanding of digital technologies in learning and can have input to the planning of content, teaching methods etc.
- On their courses, students create digital artefacts, engage in public knowledge sharing, and contribute to course content.
- Students are engaged in all major IT and estates initiatives e.g. advising, piloting, giving feedback, supporting implementation.
- There are regular conversations about the digital experience with the student union or guild (e.g. via a nominated officer).
- Students are empowered to develop their own digital tools and services e.g building apps, creating their own personal learning environment.
- Some innovations are led by student developers or staff/student partners e.g. through bids to a pot of funding, an elevator pitch, hackathons.
- Students lead or advise on some workshops/development opportunities on digital issues that are attended by staff.

Benefits

Student developer: *'Our solutions are better because we make things that will actually make life easier for students, not someone else's idea of what students want. And we're not afraid to ask questions, like when someone says "you can't do that" we can say "well, we just did it..."'.*

Head of IT Training: *'We've been amazed at the commitment the students have shown for a fairly small investment from us. Even if they aren't that comfortable with the technical side of things they can help to set up a workshop or they can go out and interview other students for their views.*'

14. How well are we approaching these issues at the strategic level?

- There are conversations across the departments, service areas and/or senior roles involved in the digital learning experience.
- 'Digital literacy' (capability, capacity, fluency) is a recognised agenda for the institution.
- Digital issues are embedded into a range of strategies e.g. Learning, Teaching and Assessment; e-learning; Student experience; Estates; Marketing; Employabity; IT/IS.
- Strategic decisions about the digital environment and estate are made with full consideration of and consultation with students and student-facing staff.

- There is at least one cross-institutional digital enhancement/change initiative in which students and the student experience are central.
- There is an institutional strategy for using learner data to enhance the student experience.
- There is an institutional strategy on open educational content and/or open educational opportunities.
- A senior manager or committee - with a dedicated budget - is responsible for enhancing the digital learning experience.
- The digital space is seen as a crucial one in which the institution operates and must realise its mission, evidenced by (e.g.) a 'digital university' statement.

Benefits:

Estates Manager: *If you're planning a new build or any kind of major refurbishment, you have to think about the digital estate at the same time. You've got to get it right for the way people are going to want to work in it for the next twenty or thirty years.*

Senior manager: *After the away day [at which student digital pioneers led a session], I stopped worrying so much about keeping up with the technology. I realised that it's about making good decisions in a world where so much of our students' lives are*