RECOMMENDATIONS FROM FE DIGITAL STUDENT STUDY

DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSULTATION

Recommendations for colleges

How can colleges undertake evaluations of learners’ use of technology?

How can colleges engage learners in the process?

What support is needed nationally?

1. Colleges should undertake their own evaluations of learners’ use of technology in order to understand the spread of experiences and expectations within their student body.
2. The methods that are chosen to engage learners in discussions about technology should acknowledge how important technology is for learners, encourage learner voices to be heard and facilitate consultation on what college can do to support learners. Colleges are likely to need to implement a range of consultation methods in order to hear a variety of learner voices from informal ‘buzz the boss’ techniques to involving student representatives on committees.
3. Evaluation and consultation methods should inform decision making processes to ensure that resource investments and acceptable use policies are aligned with learner needs.
4. Evaluations should be designed to assess learners’ access, skills and practices on entry and at set points through their time in college.
5. National support would be useful in sharing ideas about how colleges are engaging learners in conversations about technology and practical support in conducting surveys and analysing the data.
6. Develop capacity for practitioners to conduct evaluations effectively within their own contexts which lead to trustworthy results, such as by sharing appropriate methods and good practice in using these methods.

Recommendations for Jisc

How can Jisc support FE managers to develop strategies and practice in order to manage and meet learners’ expectations?

1. Raising the profile of the need to continually assess and develop student digital literacies throughout their time at college and make space for informal learning between students, and between staff and students.
2. Creating and sharing examples of college strategies that clearly differentiate between learners, their needs and the resources they bring to the learning environment.
3. Collaborating with various sector organisations who are conducting learner evaluations in order to share resources and disseminate findings.
4. Emphasising the crucial role of teaching staff in influencing how the majority of learners experience technology. Lecturers need senior manager support to create the time, access and motivation needed to experiment with technology so that staff gain experience and confidence in using learning technologies and creating modern learning resources.
5. There is an urgent need for staff development based on the findings of differentiation. How can lecturers teach to groups which encompass such variety of learner experiences and attitudes towards technology?
6. Facilitating closer working between business, employers and FE staff when determining expenditure, use of technology and assessment in order to ensure learner have access to and are using technologies in ways which prepare them for employment and enhance their lifelong employability.
7. Advising on appropriate purchases of technology in a market that appears to be is increasingly open to private providers.
8. Campaigning for sufficient funding and facilitates to meet learners’ expectations of ubiquitous access and develop staff.

Recommendations for researchers/funders

What further research is needed to investigate learner expectations and experiences?

How might it be supported?

1. Make funding available to higher education researchers for studies to investigate learner experiences within the further education and skills sector. There needs to be funding for large scale projects and/or aggregation of small scale projects.
2. Given the lack of funding for national research into learner experiences and expectations, colleges are going to need to conduct their own investigations in order to keep pace with the impact of changing expectations. However, access to these is difficult and there needs to be more better synthesis and dissemination of their findings nationally.
3. Improve research awareness in the sector such as by informing gatekeepers about the importance of being involved in research, and working with senior staff to create environments in which research projects can be conducted and succeed.
4. Treat lecturers as professionals, encourage them to use research findings, conduct their own evaluations and engender professional pride in their practice.
5. Commission practitioner led action research which results in published output which can be easily discoverable.
6. Provide FE researchers with tools to collect and interpret learner experiences.