RECOMMENDATIONS FROM FE DIGITAL STUDENT STUDY

DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSULTATION

Recommendations for college managers

1. Initiate a college digital strategy group, informed by staff and student perspectives and underpinned by local and national evidence.
2. Engage staff, learners and employers in defining expectations of technology use for staff and learners in your organisation.
3. Undertake your own evaluations of staff and learners’ use of technology in order to understand the spread of experiences and expectations within your community.
4. Plan carefully how to engage learners in a dialogue about technology. Consider using a variety of methods which together: acknowledge how important technology is for learners, encourage learner voices to be heard, include the variety of learner voices, manage learner expectations and feedback to learners how their voices have been heard and used.
5. Use technology to collect data and engage learners in debates as part of a ‘bitesized’, ongoing strategy.
6. Evaluation and consultation methods should inform decision making processes to ensure that resource investments and acceptable use policies are aligned with learner needs.
7. Assess learners’ access, skills and practices on entry and at track at set points to see how they are progressing.
8. Review the extent to which teacher training courses prepare lecturers to use technology in college. Target newly qualified staff to shape their behaviour and normalise the use of technology.
9. 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.
10. 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 create modern learning resources.

Recommendations for Jisc (and other sector bodies)

1. Support FE managers to develop strategies and practice in order to manage and meet learners’ expectations.
2. Share ideas and experiences about how colleges are engaging learners in conversations about technology and practical support for colleges in conducting surveys and analysing the data.
3. Raise 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.
4. Create and share institutional exemplars of college strategies that clearly differentiate between learners, their needs and the resources they bring to the learning environment.
5. Various sector organisations who are conducting learner evaluations should collaborate in order to share resources and disseminate findings.
6. Emphasise the crucial role of teaching staff in influencing how the majority of learners experience technology. Advise on the best models for staff development when staff are short of time. Lobby for a component on technology and pedagogy in teacher training.
7. 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?
8. Facilitate 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.
9. Advise on appropriate purchases of technology in a market that appears to be is increasingly open to private providers.
10. Campaign for sufficient funding and facilities to meet learners’ expectations of ubiquitous access and develop staff.
11. Provide working days (not workshop days) for colleges to come together to do some of the work that needs to be done e.g. develop digital literacy open badges for learners, prepare a research proposal.

Recommendations for researchers and funders of research

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

How might it be supported?

1. 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.
2. When funds are short it is even more important to have a national vehicle for sharing research findings.
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. Support FE staff to undertake postgraduate study.
6. Commission practitioner led action research which results in published output which can be easily discoverable.
7. Provide FE researchers with tools to collect and interpret learner experiences, whether funded or not (‘guerrilla research’).
8. Make ring-fenced 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.

Where to start?

The priorities coming up from the consultation events are to:

1. Develop/revise a digital strategy for your college or organisation which is informed by evidence about learners’ wants and needs.
2. Proactively engage learners in decisions about how technology is used.
3. Develop staff confidence and capacity to use technology in meaningful ways.