
Focus group process

Digital Student Skills Project

Recommended resources: voice recorder (using phone or dedicated device like the Olympus VN-731PC), camera, cards, reading rulers (for dyslexics).

Focus group process

If possible, in advance, ask the learning provider to have students seated in groups of 4 or 5, having completed the consent and profile forms.

Begin with a short introduction, welcome participants and review the aims of the research as described in the Participant Information Sheet. Ask if there are any questions, or if anyone wishes to withdraw.

Ask participants to complete the learner profile form and the consent sheet, unless done in advance [preferable option]. Depending on the ability level of participants, it may be useful if tutors help their learners with this. It is also helpful to offer dyslexia aids such as reading rulers.

Card sort activity (approx 45 minutes)

Check groups are of 4 or 5/6, preferably with one facilitator / note-taker per group. Voice recorders can also be used.

Distribute the 10 Group A cards, 'Access to Technology', to each group. Referring to the instruction card, ask the group to pick the 5 that are most important to them. Stress that there is no one right answer. The point is the discussion process that takes place within the group to reach a consensus and the reasons learners give for their choices. Sometimes learners find it easier to discard the least relevant first.

Now ask the learners to put the chosen 5 in order, with the most important at the top and the least important at the bottom. Take a photo of the prioritised cards for your records and for the option of comparing the results from other groups to extend the discussion.

Distribute the 6 Group B cards, 'Useful Skills', this time asking the group to pick the 3 that are most important to them. Proceed as for Group A.

Repeat the procedure for the Group C and D cards, taking note of the most interesting comments and a photo of each final choice.

Suggested Plenary questions

Project photos on screen or let groups move round the room to inspect the card arrangements made by other groups.

Are there any surprising similarities/differences among the groups? Does anyone feel that there is a reason for this? Do these reflect students generally?

Main questions**Access items:**

None of you considered several of these items as important to provide. Why? Is this likely to change? Is there anything you might have just taken for granted?

What technologies can you not do without, as a student?

How do you use them?

How did you discover them?

Skills items:

Looking back on your career as a student so far, what technologies have made the biggest difference to how you study?

What technologies have made a difference to your grades?

Experience items:

What new ways of using technology have been introduced to you as part of your course?

What new ways of using technology have been introduced to you by other students?

Attributes items:

How does your learning provider find out your views about digital technologies?

Do you feel they respond to you?

How would you like them to involve you?

What could they be doing better?

Summary question:

Finally, if there was one technology access or skill or experience or attribute you could have that you don't presently, what would it be?

Possible supplementary question

What is your experience so far of the match between your expectations and your experiences?

Identify groups of students for case study and / or video