Jisc NUS Benchmarking tool – the student digital experience

This benchmarking tool is the latest in a series of resources Jisc has produced to help you improve the student experience at your institution. It was produced in collaboration with the National Union of Students (NUS) and The Student Engagement Partnership (TSEP) as part of the **Jisc Digital Student Project** (digitalstudent.jiscinvolve.org/wp/) and the **Jisc Change agents' network** (jisc.ac.uk/rd/projects/change-agents-network).

Digital technologies are an increasingly important part of learning and living as a student. The tool is based on findings about how students want their digital experience to be better, both in courses of study and in other aspects of life at university or college.

Partnership approaches are particularly useful in this area of work. Students may be more digitally confident than teaching staff, and have their own attitudes, experiences, resources, and ideas to share. **The Change agents' network** (jisc.ac.uk/rd/projects/change-agents-network) has informed the aims for outstanding practice, which involve students and staff working together for digital change.

How to use the tool

You can use the tool at a number of different levels: course, department, service area (eg. library/learning resources) or whole institution. Read each of the principles and decide which of the boxes best describes your current situation. Then look at the next box to the right and decide what to work towards next. You may find once you look at the tool that you can find other points of good practice and new ideas for change.

The tool is a starting point for discussions between staff and students about what is working in the digital learning environment and what you can work together to improve. It can be used in student-staff liaison meetings or your students' unions can use the tool to facilitate a discussion with course representatives to identify good practice and areas for enhancement.

You can share your outcomes and ideas with other students' unions or institutions who are going through a similar process. What good practice can you borrow and adapt? Which changes have proved easy to bring about and why are some of them challenging?

Things to bear in mind

Most of the 'outstanding' practices involve staff and students working in partnership. The partnership needs to be meaningful in order to work, which means that both groups must listen, recognise each others' skills and resources, and be willing to compromise.

Some of the principles will be more important or relevant in your institution than others. The aim is not to achieve 'outstanding' in everything at once but to come to an agreement about what will make the most difference to students and to target resources there.

Are there a few departments or courses that you want to develop as beacons of excellent practice, or do you aim to bring everyone up to a minimum standard? Your approach will be different in each case and

you could consider ways to disseminate examples of good practice that can be adapted by other courses or departments within your institution.

Bear in mind that different groups of students have very different experiences of using digital technology, and different attitudes to what is right for them. Make sure you involve international and postgraduate students, and students with different access needs and modes of study.

Think about how you could make any positive changes more widespread and sustainable, such as embedding them into the induction or pre-induction process for all students, or making recommendations for specific IT upgrades that will benefit all.

You may disagree with some of the points and levels in the benchmarking tool – and it's OK to change it! The tool was created based on research and consultation with students, but that doesn't mean it will work at every institution. Outstanding practice will change as new technologies come along and we find new ways of using them to support the learning experience.

If you have any questions or have any feedback on the tool and its use please contact Sarah Knight (**sarah.knight@jisc.ac.uk**) and Ellie Russell (**ellie.russell@nus.org.uk**)

Good practice principle	First steps	Developing	Developed	Outstanding
Prepare students to study with digital technologies	Before they start their studies, students know how digital tools will be used in their chosen course of study. Before they start their studies, students know what digital devices and services will be available to them, and what they should provide for themselves. From the start, students know where they can get support with their digital skills.	College/university systems and any specialised software/hardware are fully introduced at induction. Students have training in online safety, responsibility and ethical issues. Students receive advice about legitimate ways that personal/social technology can support their learning.	Students have opportunities to practice using college/university systems before they start their studies. Students have opportunities to meet and collaborate in online spaces before they start their studies. There is a staged and progressive induction process with targeted support for students' digital needs.	Students have opportunities to try digital content and learning activities before they start their studies. Student undertake diagnostic tests on their digital practices and receive personal feedback to guide their development. New students are mentored by existing students on issues which include digital practices.
Support and progress students' digital capabilities throughout their studies	Core technologies are covered at induction. Support for the use of specialist software and systems is provided within courses of study. Support and guidance for core technologies and digital skills are available to students at point of need.	Ongoing programme of drop-in workshops (staff/student) for a wide range of software and systems. Early course tasks make use of digital technologies or resources. Contextualised use of technology throughout course. Opportunities to build on and showcase their digital skills e.g. in project work, extended assessments, work placement, e-portfolio.	Database of digital skills and practices (videos, tips&tricks, screencasts etc) is available and linked to course activities. Students' digital capabilities are regularly (self)assessed and reflected on as part of building a personal profile or portfolio. Learner analytics are used where appropriate to assess patterns of engagement and likely needs.	Student digital champions or similar support other students' use of digital technologies. Students' digital skills are recognised and rewarded e.g. badges, pathways to extra-curricular awards, credit on HEAR, support for external accreditation, prizes.
Embed digital capabilities into courses of study	Some digital learning activities are included in courses e.g. content related. All teaching staff are proficient in use of core systems such as the virtual learning environment and lecture capture.	All courses include digital learning activities and assessed tasks e.g. data collection and analysis, design, problem solving, blogging, compiling wiki entries, producing digital artefacts or web guides Teaching staff are proficient in the specialist academic/professional technologies of their subject and model effective use. Infrastructure and policies are flexible to support digital activities relevant to different subject specialisms.	Digital capabilities are fully embedded with assessed outcomes and specialist support. Students can choose from a range of media to express their ideas, including in assessed tasks. Digital capability is included in graduate attribute statements and assessed in course QA/review. Digitally-inspired approaches are used in the curriculum such as borderless, open and flipped learning, teach-back, co-design.	Learners' digital skills are used as assets to support negotiation/co-creation of the curriculum. Students and teaching staff are rewarded for digital expertise and innovation. Digital outcomes of learning are valued by students, teachers, curriculum teams, managers and stakeholders such as employers.
Prepare students for digital workplaces	Students have support pre-graduation to build a digital profile and CV. Support is available for online identity management and digital networking.	Students have access to an e-portfolio system or equivalent to curate and showcase their learning achievements. Students are fully prepared for online job searching e.g. with diagnostic tools and psychometric tests.	Students use state-of-the-art digital tools and up-to-date digital practices of their subject area. Digital employability skills and networking are embedded into courses of study. All students build a digital record of their course work and co-curricular activities. Present-day students have access to alumni network for mentoring and careers guidance.	Students produce professional quality digital artefacts and showcase these in public spaces. Digital technologies are used to support experiences of professional, workplace or academic practice e.g. supporting placements, working on authentic problems/research projects. Employers are involved in designing digital experiences or awards for students.

Good practice principle	First steps	Developing	Developed	Outstanding
Provide (access to) excellent digital learning content	All course information and most course content is available online via a VLE/Learning Management System or similar. Students have access to a range of texts in digital format e.g. e-books, notes and hand-outs, e-journals. Students understand that there are different types of learning content and know how to avoid plagiarism.	Course materials include video, audio, animations, apps, virtual labs/patients and other multi-media content where appropriate. Students have access to library content and services from their own devices and via their own interfaces. Required/recommended reading includes online materials.	Students find, curate and share their own digital resources as part of their course work. They have a basic understanding of different licences e.g. creative commons. Teaching staff work with specialists to develop high quality learning materials e.g. podcasts, screencasts, animations, games. Students have guidance on choosing and using different content types, finding open content and using digital content services.	Students develop digital artefacts which become valued resources in their own right. There is a strategic approach to digital content which encompasses materials created by students/staff. Students can suggest digital content purchases and are involved in developing library/ content services.
Use digital technologies to support access and inclusion	Learners have access to assistive technologies to meet identified needs, and support in using them. Information for (prospective) students is accessible on a range of devices/platforms. Digital learning content is available on a range of devices/ platforms. Digital policies e.g. 'bring your own' do not create new barriers to access.	All learners are informed of the benefits of assistive technologies and how they can access and use them ('accessibility for all'). 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 assessed tasks.	Different groups of learners are represented in decisions about digital provision. Digital technologies are used to deliver inclusivity across learning, teaching and assessment practice e.g. 'assessment for all'. Course content is available in a variety of media with formatting optimised for a variety of devices.	All digital investments and policies are examined for potential impact on access, inclusion and equality. Students with diverse needs are involved in developing the digital environment for learning.
Support students to use their own devices for learning (Bring Your Own or BYO)	Students can use their own devices/services on campus networks (restrictions are reasonable and fully explained). Teaching staff do not discourage students from using their own devices in class unless there are reasons why switching off is necessary and/or supportive of learning.	Students can use third party services e.g. Google, Dropbox, Facebook, Skype, media sharing, alongside college/university systems. Single sign-on to college/ university systems including via mobile; remote desktop connection. College/university systems optimised for mobile. Secure storage, charge points. IT support is oriented on students' own devices and services.	Clear BYO policy linked to supporting policies e.g. loan schemes, 'switch it on'. Student interface or dashboard on data about their learning, their course, and their college/ university, so they can track their own progress. Wireless printing and automatic back-up (to personal storage space) available. Desk spaces, flexible furniture and room divides, shared plug-and-play screens in common areas.	Learners are fully involved in developing BYO policies and practices and in understanding the impact. Teaching staff give learners control over how they use their own devices and services for learning. Staff/student user groups offer support and guidance on use of common devices, systems and software.
Provide a robust, flexible digital infrastructure	Robust wifi in study areas. Classroom technologies are reliable and fully supported. Students have access to generic software and services wherever they are studying. Parity of provision across campus locations and courses of study.	Robust wifi everywhere including social/residential spaces. Allocated data storage. Loan and/or preferential purchase schemes for student devices. Students have access to up-to-date software, digital hardware and systems relevant to their specialism. Minimal failures and down-times for core systems.	Ongoing investment in networks and services to meet changing needs, as identified by students. Infrastructure planning is joined up with other aspects of the student experience e.g. TLA, library, student services, estates. Foresight and flexibility to accommodate emergent/ specialist uses. Students have seamless access to desktop and services wherever they are.	Five-year (at least) plan to develop virtual estate alongside real estate. Students engaged as stakeholders in all decisions about the digital environment/ infrastructure (along with student-facing staff). Students can build or use their own dashboards/interfaces with college/university data and info services. Students have their own web domains.

Good practice principle	First steps	Developing	Developed	Outstanding
Communicate with students about their digital experience	Students know where to go for help with digital issues. Students know what networks, devices and hardware are available to them. Students know what digital content and services are available to them. Students know how the college/university uses their personal data.	Students are advised on a course-by-course basis what devices and services they should bring to support their studies. Students understand policies affecting their use of digital technologies e.g. fair use, plagiarism and copyright, 'switch it on', netiquette, e-safety. Students know how they can comment on and contribute to digital provision and the processes for addressing any problems.	Students are involved in decisions about digital provision through user groups and other feedback. Student reps have a good understanding of digital issues. Students are regularly polled about their digital experiences and their feedback is acted on by services and departments. Informal feedback is routinely sought in teaching groups and around specific services/issues: this is accessible and engaging.	Students are involved as partners in developing the digital environment and the digital experience e.g. as digital champions, developers, co-researchers, interns, and are trained and supported to engage fully in these roles. Staff and student groups work together to understand digital issues in and out of the curriculum, and to take forward solutions.
Use digital systems to build a sense of belonging	Students can choose how they receive information and communications on their devices/services. Core services/systems are easy and intuitive to use on a range of devices, including mobile. Students can join societies and interest groups online pre-arrival. Students can find out about their course online and with a clear course identity.	Students can personalise college/university services e.g. with pictures, networking opportunities, links to personal services Students can contact support services (including personal tutors where appropriate) online. Sign-up to college/university systems is treated as a means of achieving identity - e.g. with games, badges. Students can get engaged with their course online e.g making module selections.	Students have their own web space and email for life. Students have an e-portfolio, learning journal, CV-for-life or other professional toolkit they can use throughout their studies and beyond. The student digital experience is mapped from first contact to alumnus, with the emphasis on building identity and loyalty.	Collaborative systems promote online communities of practice across staff/student boundaries e.g. interest-based, subject-based. Collaborative systems enable study support groups and skills exchanges. Prospective students can access current students and current students can access alumni through shared networks.
Provide online and blended options where they offer genuine enhancements	A number of fully online courses are available. All courses provide some online resources via the VLE or similar. Additional study skills and digital literacy materials are available online. Some teaching staff are skilled online facilitators.	Blended learning activities are offered in most courses e.g. online discussions, online quizzes, online collaborative tasks, blogging, wiki-building. There is a growing cohort of teaching staff with online experience and expertise.	Blended learning is the norm for all courses of study. All teaching staff can blend online and offline activities to best advantage e.g. in flipped and open classroom approaches. There is a specialised centre or team dedicated to online provision, with a cohort of expert staff. Teaching and learning strategies/policies reflect the specifics of blended/online study.	Students engage in transformational online experiences e.g. learning in global networks; participation in authentic professional communities; contributing to open research. Face-to-face and online students can work towards the same awards with parity of experience and shared curriculum spaces.
Foster digital wellbeing	All students are aware of policies on safe, respectful behaviour in digital spaces. All students are aware of the risks of sharing content and engaging with others online. It is clear how students can report concerns about their safety/wellbeing and get support online, whether for digital issues or for other issues that they prefer not to address face-to-face. Student data is used transparently and ethically.	There is student-led training in respectful behaviour which incorporates digital behaviours. Students have access to online spaces where they can experiment safely with new (to them) tools, services and practices. Students have access to non-digital alternatives in learning where appropriate. There are time/spaces where students (and staff) are encouraged to 'switch off'.	Digital investments are assessed for long-term impacts on the human and natural environment; 'green computing' alternatives are used where possible. Student reflection, self-understanding and self-regulation is actively promoted through e.g. reflective tasks, digital storytelling, blogging, self-reflective tools. Students have safe spaces and skilled support to explore and develop their digital identity/ies.	Staff and student groups - including staff and student representative bodies - work together to explore solutions to cyber-bullying and risky online behaviours. Staff and student groups - including staff and student representative bodies - work together to explore the impacts of digital technology on learning, on learning-teaching relationships, and on health and wellbeing.