Jisc Digital Learner Stories

Jade

This is one of twelve ‘digital learner stories’ collected and published by Jisc as part of its Digital Student project. You can read other stories and follow up the themes from Jade’s story by visiting the Jisc Digital Student blog: https://digitalstudent.jiscinvolve.org/wp/

Jade's video


About Jade

Jade is 22 years old and has recently completed a Level 3 AAT (Association of Accounting Technicians) course at Bradford College. She was sponsored by her employer and studied one day a week at the college while working full time.

Jade's digital learning

- Jade naturally uses a range of technology for educational, work and social purposes. For example:
  - she uses a desktop PC at work and owns 3 personal digital devices
  - she uses the same social media tools to contact friends and connect with her AAT peers
  - she appreciates the college VLE for having all her course resources in the one place, for connecting with her tutors, and for the convenience of being able to access it at home and work
- A blended learning module on her AAT course gave Jade an insight into how helpful this mode of learning can be for those who combine study with work because:
  - there was a schedule of taught sessions but all the material was available on the VLE for review and exam revision
  - the flexible form allowed her to skip some of the material she already knew, saving time
  - the collaborative ethos encouraged her to help other students who were struggling with topics she understood, and she feels this reinforced her overall understanding
• Jade's key message is that blended learning makes it easier for those who are studying and working. It is important that:
  o a blended learning course is well designed and accessible from different places and devices
  o the course is delivered by trained staff who use digital tools confidently in the classroom and online

Jade's story

Jade has grown up with computers at home and school and is at ease with a range of digital tools. She is, for example, "the one setting up my mum and dad's phones and computers." She says, "I'm definitely a problem solver. I Google a lot of things." She was taught to touch type at school and finds her fast typing speed a real asset when it comes to digital ways of working. Until she took this course, however, her experience of digital technology at school and college was limited to teachers using digital boards. After completing her 'A' levels Jade took a job in accountancy, using a range of accounting packages and software every day. Her technology use outside of work involved social media for keeping up with friends, and using health and fitness apps to pursue her personal hobbies.

Then Jade's employer offered to support her through further training to progress her accountancy career. When Jade returned to study a Level 3 Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) course, she initially found the use of digital technology to be in line with her previous experiences. Classrooms were equipped with a digital board, and computers were available for students to use in the library. But there were differences. Students could borrow laptops to help them link study at home, work and college. A Moodle VLE provided a platform for resources, links and communication with course tutors. Jade found this "easy to use to be honest. It's pretty self-explanatory." On her Level 3 course it was especially practical for "revising when I was outside of college and [having] access from home. There were past papers on Moodle." A link to the AAT website allowed her to connect her college work with up-to-date information and requirements from her professional body. There were "'green light' tests. There were loads of resources on there as well [and I knew] it was reliable. That was enough."

Jade quickly recognised that working full time put extra pressure on her college attendance. She took the initiative to set up a Facebook Messenger group so that her class could keep in contact with each other, and share information and updates if anyone missed a day's attendance. It was a blended learning module on spreadsheets that really opened her eyes to the way digital technology could support her learning. At the time she was spending just one day a week in college and she really needed to make the best use of her limited study time. She was already an experienced spreadsheet user, and the blended learning tutor started out by checking what learners already knew. Jade found that: "I knew a lot of it or only needed refreshing. So I skipped about two thirds of the module.... I was often helping other people as well. I really enjoyed doing that. It meant I wasn't stuck in hour-long lessons doing things I already knew. I could do the things that I needed to learn. I managed to finish that module early, and that really benefitted me."

Jade is now thinking about her next AAT course and hopes to find one that offers more blended learning options. Meanwhile she has picked up on new ways that her personal technology makes it easier to manage a full schedule. She is using her phone to keep organised with digital to-do lists and calendar reminders: "your calendar..."
is always with you." She is happy to use online resources alongside textbooks and is aware that she learns best by being "shown how to do something and then copying it."

Jade has just one gripe about the use of digital technology in education and it is "when people don't know how to use the technology properly." Even in primary school she says she noticed that "some of them [teachers] really needed more training. A lot of lessons were taken up with teachers trying to do something on the SMART board and it was quite frustrating." Her excellent experience on a blended learning course was thanks to expert staff, who were confident about using the technology and about offering a flexible course. She also had good internet access at work, and robust IT support at college.

Jade is now using digital tools to organise her time and tasks, communicate, and find and use online resources. She can switch seamlessly between the formal learning offered on her college courses and the informal learning she picks up at work and through online connections. Jade's positive experience of a well-designed blended learning module has opened her eyes to other opportunities as she continues to develop her career.

Key issues

- **Flexibility**: Especially valuable to those who combine work with study, the flexibility afforded by digital resources means that confident learners can go straight to the materials they need, while less confident learners can go at their own pace.

- **Tutors as digital models and mentors**: Students really benefit when staff are confident and up to date with digital tools; they also notice and can become frustrated if staff don't use the provided technologies well.

- **Communication**: Digital media allow learners to keep in touch with their tutor and fellow learners wherever they are, and to connect with people who share a common interest.

- **Skills for work**: Digital tools allow students to connect with professional web sites and networks while they are studying.

- **Making time**: Calendars, to-do lists and other time and task management tools allow learners to feel in control. Being able to access quizzes and test papers online also means revision can be fitted in ‘little and often’, which for most learners means better retention.

- **Supporting others**: Learners are often happy to support other learners with their digital skills, and as Jade has found, mentors can benefit from the experience with enhanced confidence and understanding.
Jade uses the following technology, apps and websites

- **Instagram**: social use
- **Moodle VLE**: for course resources, available from home and work
- **Snapchat**: social use
- **Facebook Messenger**: communicating with peers on the AAT course
- **WhatsApp**: communicating with peers on the AAT course
- **Google**: problem solving and searching