Anglia Ruskin University: A digital literacy framework for staff and students

Background
Anglia Ruskin University (anglia.ac.uk) has grown out of a number of colleges and institutes to become a thriving modern university with campuses in Cambridge, Chelmsford, London and Peterborough. The last is a dedicated healthcare education site while the London campus focuses on business, finance and law. The new Anglia Ruskin MedTech Campus will be one of the world’s largest health innovation parks.

Nearly 40,000 students study with Anglia, mainly professional subjects (anglia.ac.uk/study), with many offering full professional accreditation. Partner institutions around the UK and overseas allow students to study close to home, and there is a large and growing portfolio of distance learning (https://distancelearning.anglia.ac.uk) courses, serving 3,000 students a year. The university also works with 2,000 businesses (anglia.ac.uk/business-employers) through its business services, professional development portfolio, consultancy, Knowledge Transfer Partnerships and the Anglia Ruskin Enterprise Academy.

Anglia has robust corporate strategies (http://ji.sc/anglia-corporate) with clear targets, which give prominence to developing the digital literacies of staff and students.

Strategic priorities
The new Learning, teaching and assessment strategy 2015-17 sets out a goal for ‘staff to improve and extend their digital literacy skills’, with a milestone for 2015 to ‘develop a barometer of digital literacy and establish a baseline digital literacy requirement for staff, with CPD needs identified through induction, teaching review and appraisal’. In the same strategy, under student engagement, the university commits itself to ‘enable our students to acquire high-level academic, information and digital literacies necessary for success in their courses and future careers’. To support this goal the Digital barometer will also be used to assess classroom and online practice, and to support digital mapping in the course review process.

The university is taking an increasingly strategic approach to boosting its NSS scores and further enhancing student employability. Using digital technology to support access to learning for all, is another theme that sits well with its mission for equality, diversity and inclusion (http://ji.sc/Anglia-equality).

With such a strong focus on professional learning and accreditation, teaching staff at Anglia have to keep up with digital practice in their subject area. For example, in the Faculty of health, social care and education, students explore the e-health revolution and the increasing role of digital technologies in the hands of patients, as well as in healthcare settings.

The digital NHS is a big thing. We can’t shy away from the fact that our students need to be digitally capable. The new nursing curriculum has embedded digital literacy throughout.
Leadership of change
Anglia Ruskin University has a new Vice chancellor (VC) who sees the digital campus and digital learning environment as crucial to the university’s success. The Deputy vice chancellor academic (DVC) is a long-term champion of digital literacy, and in 2016 convened a Digital futures group with cross-faculty representation. The role of the group was to help inform a clear view of the demands likely to be placed on graduates in the future. There is a strong team of Directors for learning and teaching, one in each of the five faculties, who meet regularly with staff from Anglia Learning and Teaching (ALT) to inform the university’s policies and practices.

ALT is ARU’s professional services team responsible for supporting the development of institutional learning, teaching and assessment. It includes learning technology and digital media specialists, academic developers and researchers, and convenes the Learning technologist forum. There are staff in the university library and IT services who support staff and students with specific digital skills. Faculty learning technologists also play a key role in taking forward the digital agenda.

Through serendipity or proactive recruitment, many people in the university and in leadership roles have arrived from other institutions where they have led digital literacy projects or agendas. So between them they share a strong set of skills and interests: in digital pedagogy, digital badges, digital capability frameworks, and in leading curriculum change.

 Actions for digital capability
Anglia Ruskin University’s Digital literacy framework ([http://ji.sc/anglia-digital-literacy](http://ji.sc/anglia-digital-literacy)) starts out from Jisc’s definition of digital literacy. The five areas of competence are taken from the EU’s established Digital competence framework ([http://ji.sc/EU-digital-competence](https://3.daysofdigitalliteracy.com)) with the addition of some insights from earlier work in Jisc’s Developing digital Literacies Programme ([http://ji.sc/digital-capabilities-framework](http://ji.sc/digital-capabilities-framework)). Initial development was carried out by the then Director of learning and teaching for the Faculty of health, social care and education, the then learning technologist (who is also undertaking a doctorate in education in digital literacy) and by colleagues in ALT.

This involved writing statements to illustrate each area of competence at different levels: beginner, intermediate and advanced. An institutional working group was inaugurated by ALT comprising academic and non-academic staff, the library, human resources and other services. This group worked to further develop the statements, ensuring the language was relevant to both staff and students.

The framework is now well established within the university, and as part of a 2016 staff conference its impact in different subject areas was explored. It provides a foundation for two main areas of work: (a) a digital literacy competency audit for staff; and (b) the embedding of digital competencies in the curriculum.

(a) The staff audit or ‘digital barometer’ (available internally only) was created by translating the framework statements into statements and presenting them as a quiz. Individuals receive a score for their overall level of competence under each of the five literacies in the framework. The score can be used by staff to identify their existing strengths and whether they need any further development.

At the same time, ALT are using the first five days of every month (October-March) to offer bite-sized staff development activities aligned to the framework. Participants spend five minutes of each day carrying out a task on the Five days of digital literacy (#5DoDL) ([https://5daysdigtalliteracy.com](https://5daysdigtalliteracy.com)) WordPress site. If they complete all five tasks they receive a digital badge for that week’s activity, available through the Credly ([credly.com](http://credly.com)) platform. Over 400 staff enrolled in October.
As a pilot in the Faculty of health, social care and education, the then Director of learning and teaching, a learning technologist and colleagues developed a series of digital badges for each of the five literacies at each of the three levels. Teaching staff in three subject areas were interviewed about their current practice, and the framework was loosely mapped onto the existing curriculum. The central design and delivery team developed the 15 badges and the faculty made them available through Credly. The badges were mapped against each module on a pilot course, not against students’ grades, so that all students passing a module could claim the relevant badge. The intention now is to roll the badges out more widely across the curriculum.

Lynda.com is widely used by staff and students, and Anglia Ruskin already runs competitions to promote further engagement. ALT is now building links from the barometer to curated Lynda.com resources, along with library guides, other staff development materials and support, so that people completing the self-assessment audit are guided directly to relevant CPD activities. There are aspirations to track the use of the barometer and uptake of the linked resources in order to build a picture of overall development needs, at institutional, faculty and departmental level.

Another area of future development is in the co-curriculum. Activities alongside a course of study can make a big difference to students’ employability and future opportunities: digital badges could help students to reflect on the value of these activities and build an evidence base. As an example, in the Faculty of medical science, an inclusivity project is collecting stories about how students are using technology to overcome disability and access problems. These stories and ideas are being shared with other students via the web and social media. There are a number of ways in which students’ digital capabilities are starting to be recognised and shared.

The next development of the framework is to decide on an institutional threshold level for each of the digital literacies and their subsets. Disciplines (based on courses or departments) may then decide to define their own thresholds, recognising that the required level for different elements in the framework will differ from subject to subject.

Moving ahead

We wanted to recognise what staff were already doing as phase 1 before trying to change their practice to further develop digital capabilities in their curriculum. So if their modules already required students to create a digital poster or do an online literature review, we wanted to recognise that was already developing digital literacy.

Our student partners were great, they went around talking to classes and blogging, and they … provided wonderful energy to the project. Their enjoyment and ambition was infectious, they were wonderful to work with.

It’s definitely going to stay around as an agenda. The pilot projects with badging have been successful, so we are going to continue to roll that model out.
Opportunities and challenges for the future
The biggest risk to moving ahead is staff time and resources.

Getting up to speed with the available technologies, and exploring new approaches such as flipped or networked learning, all take time and confidence, and the opportunity to explore. Teaching staff must have more than one digital trick up their sleeves: they must offer a variety of approaches to meet the different demands of the curriculum and the different needs of students.

Lessons learned

» A detailed framework of digital competences can be used for recognition of staff and students. At Anglia Ruskin, student competences were attributed to modules rather than to individuals, so all students passing a module gained a badge. Staff were able to assess themselves directly against the framework using the Digital barometer.

» It is challenging to devise competence statements that work for both staff and students, and across a wide variety of roles. This can only be done with the full engagement of stakeholders, to ensure the language and examples used are accessible to all.

» An audit process based on self-assessment and linked through to self-paced learning resources is an effective approach to digital capability development. Several platforms offer the required functionality of serving and scoring questions, but there can be challenges linking from audit results to the relevant resources. Playlists in Lynda.com offer one possible solution.

» Digital badges are motivating for students and can be used across the curriculum and co-curriculum. Student champions are particularly valuable here, e.g. designing badges, piloting their use and encouraging their uptake.

» If one has an ambitious agenda to change teaching practices, to put much more online and challenge student expectations, it takes time to upskill staff. That can be challenging with our current workloads.

An effective way to raise the capabilities of a whole cohort of staff is to offer bite-sized activities that they undertake voluntarily, in their own time (e.g. five minutes a day, for five days), but in the same time-frame (e.g. the same week). This offers a good compromise between personal flexibility and the cohort effect.

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Any unattributed quotes in the text were provided and have been approved by the contacts above.

For more information on all related resources please see the Building digital capability project page.

http://ji.sc/building-digicap