Engaging respondents in your Insight surveys

About this guide

This guide is designed to help you ensure that your target audience (respondents) is fully engaged with the Insight surveys. It suggests ways you can build on that engagement to:

» Create an on-going dialogue with respondents about their digital experience
» Develop partnership and collaborative enhancement projects
» Enrich your Insight survey findings with evidence from qualitative/participative approaches

This guide has six sections:

1. Why engage respondents?
2. The ethics of respondent engagement
3. Encouraging completion of the Insights survey
4. Beyond the Insight surveys: qualitative and participative approaches
5. Beyond the Insight surveys: continuously enhancing the digital experience
6. Responding to findings and building partnerships for change

1. Why engage respondents?

A survey allows you to reach out to a large number of respondents with a relatively small investment required from each of them. It provides clear evidence for action. Running a survey with a high-profile campaign sends out a message that you care about an issue - in this case about the quality of their digital experience.
We hope the Insight surveys will be part of a real dialogue with staff and students, leading to visible and tangible changes. This is easier if some staff and students are more deeply involved in the process. Potential groups that are easier to engage might include:

» Staff and student digital ambassadors
» Your students’ union or guild and the trade unions for staff

There is almost no part of the process that students and staff could not lead or support, but obvious tasks include:

» Designing a promotional campaign (more about this next)
» Helping other respondents complete the survey live (eg in common rooms, library areas etc)
» Taking part in focus groups or other qualitative methods
» Helping to interpret the results

Staff and students can also be involved in practical developments to make the digital experience better once you have decided what needs to happen next.

2. The ethics of staff and student engagement

For any survey of staff and students you need to consider the ethics of their participation. Research ethics is not usually a consideration if you are collecting data from your own staff and students to improve their learning experience. However, if you plan to publish or present the results of your survey, or use them as part of a research project, you may want to consider this issue. Your institution will have an ethical approval process and can advise you. (In designing the Insight surveys we have conformed to the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research from the British Educational Research Association.)

It is much more likely that you will need to consider survey fatigue. We thought hard about the ethics of developing a new survey tool when most students and staff are regularly surveyed about other issues. Our FAQ for Insight surveys, plus the Insight surveys background and development, explain why we feel this is worth doing. Institutions that have run the Insight surveys have found the information valuable, appreciate the fact that the findings allow them to take action and say that the surveys provided data that was not being gathered in other ways. We have taken care to offer the Insight surveys at a quiet time of year in comparison to other (UK) surveys, and to provide a broad enough window that we hope will ensure you can find a time to suit your
students and staff. An effective way to counter student and staff cynicism about surveys is to involve them throughout the survey process and to make sure that you respond to their feedback.

You will also need to be clear about data privacy and security. Individual responses remain anonymous, and your organisational data can only be accessed by your lead contact(s) and the Jisc online surveys team. We do not release any summative data unless there are enough participating institutions in each benchmarking group to be sure no single institution can be identified. Please read our guidance on Insights surveys data protection and management issues (http://bit.ly/DEIdata and also available at digitalinsights.jisc.ac.uk/our-service/advice-and-guidance). We also encourage you to find out more about how Jisc online surveys keeps your data safe at onlinesurveys.ac.uk/help-support/online-surveys-security.

Finally, please consider the personal benefits staff and students will gain from being involved with the survey process. If they are working as change agents they might be paid for their time, or receive special training, or gain a useful skill, endorsement, or qualification. If they are taking part in a focus group, you might reward them with refreshments or a voucher to take away. Staff and students are often highly motivated to improve things for others, but there should be tangible rewards for their time and commitment.

There is more advice about engaging students in particular in the Jisc guide to Enhancing the student digital experience: a strategic approach and Engaging and empowering students. Both include institutional case studies and examples.

3. Encouraging completion of the Insight surveys

When planning to use the Insight surveys (http://bit.ly/DEIplanning and also available at digitalinsights.jisc.ac.uk/our-service/advice-and-guidance) you will have considered how you will distribute the survey. If you are going for a selected sample of respondents, you need to get close to 100% completion from that sample – for example by supervising live completion. If you are promoting the survey to your entire population, you will need to achieve a large enough completion rate for your sample to be representative. In this case you can use methods such as email, a web page, a link within the virtual learning environment (VLE) and social media to promote the survey uniform resource locator (URL).

Generally, we recommend a window of around two weeks to collect responses. If responses are still building after this time you can extend the deadline but too distant a deadline will encourage respondents to put off taking part. It is important to issue regular reminders, varying these and engaging those who have not yet taken part with new information such as emerging findings.
The following provides examples and evidence of good practice in the student and staff Insight surveys, but their relevance is also applicable across all the different Insight surveys.

a. **Student Insight surveys**

In the past, institutions have worked with students to design a promotional campaign. This has included social media memes, flyers, video clips, postcards, e-posters and more. You could start by asking student ambassadors and the student union or guild (who we recommend that you get on board with the project at the outset). Another option could be to create a project for students on a media course.

We have produced a series of case studies from universities and colleges that have been involved in the service improvement of the student Insight surveys (available from our website at digitalinsights.jisc.ac.uk). Many of these deal with student engagement. What follows are a few tips that have been distilled from those examples.

**Engagement ideas from universities**

» Emphasise the benefits to students, eg the link between digital experience and graduate attributes, employability and lifelong learning; focus on opportunities to effect real change

» Ease of completion: emphasise that it is quick and easy to complete: make available via mobiles eg within an institutional app, or on web site, desktop, or within VLE

» Generate a campaign or initiative around the Insight surveys, with a launch and plenty of visually arresting campaign materials

» Digital communications for students: use student-facing media eg social media, emails, VLE notifications, texts to mobile devices. Consider visual elements eg a logo, a video clip. Use student designers where possible

» Print communications: poster campaigns, slogans, 'you said, we did', attractive logos and infographics – again consider student and-led design. Repurpose any print resources for social media

» Live or timetabled completion: use drop-in sites where students can complete the survey eg in the library, at help desks, at a student hub, in course sessions; pre-load the survey onto tablets and have student or peer guides out and about, helping and encouraging completion

» Work with student representatives eg student union, course reps, digital champions, existing change agent programmes; students trust these routes and expect their feedback to count
» Ensure staff responsible for the overall student experience are fully involved and can see the links between digital and other issues. Persuade teaching staff of the value so they encourage completion

» Offer incentives: free food, vouchers, institutional merchandise, prize draw for tablet or other digital devices

**Engagement tips from FE colleges**

» Emphasise that this is an opportunity to improve specific features of their experience eg the VLE, communications with college, access to support, delivery of course content

» Emphasise ease of use: link to Insight surveys within college app; make available on campus pre-loaded onto mobile devices

» Offer opportunities to complete the Insight survey in drop-in sessions and open access areas eg library, refectory, learning centre

» Communication: keep this snappy and positive; consider student-generated communications

» Embed into on-going processes eg learner voice, induction, course feedback

» Emphasise benefit to students of enhanced digital skills eg employability, lifelong learning

» Encourage tutors and tutorial teams to make time for completion during classes or tutorials

» Incentives: offer vouchers, prize draws, free refreshments

**Engagement tips for online students**

» Emphasise the benefits to other online students and the chance to enhance the online experience

» Link to the Insight survey within the learning environment

» Encourage participation via social media; use emerging findings to engage commitment. Online students are often interested in the process of online learning so emphasise the opportunity to reflect on it

» Persuade teaching and support staff of the value of the Insights survey and encourage them to refer students

» Offer incentives such as institutional merchandise, a digital accolade or badge
Some suggested text for communicating with students about the Insights surveys:

The student Insight survey is a national survey to find out more about how you use digital technologies and how this affects your experience of learning. We [or institution name] have chosen to use the Insight survey because we know digital issues are important to you. The Insight survey will allow us to:

› Find out how you would like digital technologies to be used in learning and teaching
› Understand how you use our digital environment and services and how we could improve them
› Target resources towards the issues that matter to you
› Better understand how we can support your digital capability and employability needs
› Work collaboratively with you to improve and shape your digital experience
› Help you reflect on your own digital experience and highlight areas you may wish to develop further

Online version:

The Student Online Digital Experience Insights Survey is a national survey to find out more about how your experience of online learning. We [or institution name] have chosen to use the insights because it covers issues we know are important to you. The Insights survey will allow us to:

› Know more about how you study and learn online
› Understand how you use the online learning environment and services and how we could improve
› Target resources towards the issues that matter to you
› Find out what helps you to succeed
› Better understand how we can support your digital capability and employability needs
› Work collaboratively with you to improve and shape your digital experience
› Help you reflect on your own digital experience and highlight areas you may wish to develop further

Reminders and prompts are important while the survey is live. You could pick on a feature of the live data and use it to pique students’ interest. ‘So far, 60% of students in our live survey say that they can access university computers most of the time. Do you agree? Tell us what you think...’.
Remember that visual communication is often more persuasive and appealing than text alone. An image of students in your setting, using technology together, sends a powerful message about what you are trying to achieve. There is a suitable image included on the first screen of the Insight survey.

Create a sense that the Insight survey is an event or initiative rather than just a survey. This might mean a launch, ‘live’ activities to support completion of the Insight survey, updates on progress and a public report-back event at the end.

b. Staff Insight surveys

We suggest that you upload staff emails so that Jisc online surveys can generate custom invitations to each individual. This means you can: track response rates and issue reminders; import other data about your respondents such as their department; compare your final dataset with other feedback you may have collected from your teaching staff. The process is fully explained in uploading staff and student data into your Insights survey (bit.ly/DEIuploaddata). Despite the advantages of this approach, you can simply distribute the URL directly from the launch pad if you prefer.

You will also need to write the text of the email(s) you send out to your potential participants and any other communications you plan to have with them eg printed flyers, social media messages, a web page. We suggest you emphasise that the organisation wants to hear their views.

Staff version:

The staff Insight survey is a national survey to find out more about the experiences of teaching staff involved in the delivery of learning, about how they use digital technologies in their teaching and also how they engage with key aspects of the digital environment provided by their institution. We [or institution name] have chosen to use the Insight survey because we know digital issues are important to you. The Insight survey will allow us to:

› Find out how you would like digital technologies to be used in learning and teaching
› Understand how you use our digital environment and services and how we could improve them
› Target resources towards the issues that matter to you
› Better understand how we can support your professional development requirements
› Work collaboratively with you to improve and shape your digital experience
Help you reflect on your own digital experience and highlight areas you may wish to develop further

Running the staff Insights survey in addition to the student Insights survey provides us with additional data and allows us to triangulate the findings. Exploring your views on digital teaching, learning and assessment helps us to build a richer picture.

Teaching staff will expect a well-considered rationale explaining:

» Why you are running the survey
» How their data will be kept private and anonymous
» What you will do with the findings

You can draw on some of the ideas used in the student Insight surveys – such as prize draws, live completions (perhaps at scheduled meetings and away-days) and getting students involved in championing the idea to teaching staff. Staff can be guided to this web page (Information for teaching staff), so they have a better understanding of what the staff Insight survey is all about.

4. Qualitative and participative approaches

The Insight surveys use concise question sets which have been developed for ease of interpretation and use. Although they will give you reliable data from a large sample of respondents, they do not provide all the detail you might need to understand (for example) what respondents dislike about the VLE or why respondents in different subject areas have different experiences of the digital classroom.

You can obtain this more detailed view by supplementing your survey with qualitative and participative approaches. These could include:

» Focus groups and consultation events (may be conducted online with online respondents)
» Interviews, or simple vox pops (short video interviews)
» Elicitation or observation techniques (used to understand in detail how a respondent interacts with a particular system)
» Respondent journeys or learning logs for students (usually produced by students over a period of time, for example using a blog or video log)
Interviews and elicitation/observation methods require quite a lot of researcher time and expertise. If you have that available among staff members or students, you are doing well! The rest of this point concerns focus groups, consultation events and learner journeys, which are a realistic option for most teams.

» Consider running events that **combine information and consultation**: tell respondents why you ran the Insight surveys, what you hoped to achieve and what some of the highlight results have been. Then invite them to help explore the results further and decide on strategies for change.

» Remember to **involve respondents from a range of different groups** as far as is possible. Groups that may have different digital experiences include international, older, work-based and disabled respondents.

» In focus groups, be very clear before you start what **four or five questions** you want to explore. You could use specific findings from the Insight surveys and look for more detail or explanation. You could find out which of the issues identified by the Insight surveys are really important to respondents.

» Open discussion can be valuable to get respondents talking and it is sometimes easier to record a plenary session than small groups. But respondents often come up with more varied and precise responses if they are allowed to work in small group. So try to spend time on **focused activities** leading to outcomes that can easily be recorded. Having respondents write down their key points is the simplest way of doing this but there are more imaginative approaches, eg a card sort or priorities sheet (see below). Try asking respondents to: write a postcard from three or five years in the future; design a poster or app (paper prototype only) to support their digital experience; build a model with Lego or cardboard and photograph it; video each other describing 'what one thing' would improve their digital experience. It is particularly easy to record an online focus group, and this may be the only possible approach with online respondents. Outcomes should be meaningful without too much further processing or analysis.

» A **card sort** has respondents working in small groups to put a series of written items in order, for example in order of priority or importance. There are materials available offer resources and guidance on how to run a card sort. Items for sorting are suggested in the table below.

» A **priorities sheet** is simply a list of suggestions, or actions, that participants prioritise by adding coloured paper dots or pen marks. Participants should have a limited number of dots available to distribute. It helps to have the suggestions pre-printed, ideally on A3 paper, or
written on flip chart paper, so several people can work on them at once. If you are working with online respondents, then a poll with multiple response options can be used.

» Ask participants’ permission to take photographs or video of any live event(s). It will be valuable evidence of participants involvement and will also provide reusable materials for further campaigns around the digital experience. See for example our digital learner stories (digitalstudent.jiscinvolve.org/wp/digital-learner-stories) gathered as part of our digital student project which was set up to explore students’ expectations and experiences with digital technology and our Learner voice videos (digitalstudent.jiscinvolve.org/wp/fe-and-skills-digital-student-study/fe-digital-students-key-outputs) from our FE digital student study.

» Student journeys are an alternative approach to focus groups: they follow a group of participants over time and in some detail. Participants reflect on issues in their learning experience using a blog, written responses to prompts, video or audio recording. They may be prompted with specific questions to consider, for example by email or by Skype interview. Learning journeys are powerful resources for students themselves as well as giving researchers a deep insight into how students experience issues in their course and learning environment.

Note that the above examples specifically relate to students but could also be adapted to work with staff groups to explore their digital teaching experience.

5. Responding to findings and building partnerships for change

» If you have followed a good communications strategy and achieved a good response rate to the Insight survey(s0), you have already given your respondents an interest in the results. You can use whichever methods have proved most effective – personal contacts, email, social media, print, location-based actions and campaigns – to get respondents involved in the process. Pick out one or two headline findings and ask respondents to help explore them and suggest strategies for change.

» In relation to students, they may have many skills and ideas for improving their digital experience. Jisc runs an annual EdTech competition for the best student technology developments, and some institutions are running similar competitions for themselves. Students with less technical skills can be engaged in developing guidance materials on digital issues, creating video clips, running a social media site, or gathering student views.
» You may find some ideas and resources to help you in our guide on **Developing successful student-staff partnerships** or find it useful to join our **Change Agents’ Network**. We also have a series of **Case studies** in student-led digital change. If you do not already have a student change agent network or a group of digitally-aware student/learner representatives, these are good places to start.

» Our detailed online guide **responding to your findings** will be available in autumn 2018 and will advise you how you can look at your responses question-by-question as well as how to interpret them, locally and in relation to the national benchmark. This will include ideas for responding to each issue which you can share with respondents and other stakeholders as you build partnerships for change.

### 6. Continuously enhancing the digital experience

The Insight survey project can kickstart or add new energy to discussions about the digital experience and can demonstrate to senior managers that respondents care about digital issues. We recommend running the Insight survey(s) annually so that you can monitor, track and assess improvements on an ongoing basis.

There are also other things you can do to continuously assess and enhance students’ experiences of the digital environment. For example:

» Invest in on-going **student change agent** or **partnership projects** in which ideas for change are brought forward by students themselves. Partnership projects have been shown to support effective uptake and use of technology and to help students to develop their digital skills.

» Make sure all student-facing services are using **digital networks and media** to engage. There is guidance from Jisc about **engaging students via social media**. Twitterfalls, padlets, idea clouds and other simple tools can be used quickly to gather ideas and post responses. There is no formal sampling involved, and there is no opportunity to benchmark or baseline for future years, but informal feedback can be a very visible and valuable aspect of service improvement.

» **Train student representatives** – union officers, course reps, peer mentors etc – to understand how digital issues affect the learning experience, and how they affect different groups of students. The digital experience will become better integrated into established processes of student engagement.
Join up your systems for consulting with staff and students to ensure existing data is re-used intelligently and respondents are not subjected to unnecessary surveys (there is more about joining up data in our guide to analysing and interpreting your Insights data (http://bit.ly/DEIanalyse also available online at digitalinsights.jisc.ac.uk/our-service/advice-and-guidance). You can now write customised questions within the Insight surveys which means you could ask about a number of local issues at the same time as you are benchmarking responses to our core questions.

A ladder of engagement model can be useful in identifying where your institution is up to in its approach and in moving from consulting with students to empowering them.

Also consider using the NUS and HEA student engagement toolkit and associated resources.

A checklist for engaging respondents beyond the Insight surveys:

1. **Explore what staff and students actually do** with digital technologies as well as what they say. This requires more subtle, participative and qualitative methods eg observation and elicitation, guided focus groups.

2. **Acknowledge the importance of demographics** – the different experiences of staff and students from different backgrounds. Ensure diverse staff and student groups are represented when eliciting data eg mature, users of assistive tech, work-based, overseas etc.

3. **Similarly acknowledge the importance of subject and discipline** – encourage local (course, faculty, department) engagement with staff and students and ensure voices from different subject areas are heard.

4. **Have an on-going institutional forum for staff and students' ideas** that different professional services, departments and initiatives can use to explore specific issues. This allows staff and students to see all sides of the conversation and get feedback on how their ideas are being taken forward. Third-party services eg Padlet, Twitterfall, virtual suggestion boxes, instant polling can be used for quick feedback. Jisc is supporting the development of a student-led app, Unitu, which helps to close the feedback loop.

5. **Ensure staff and students are informed** about what is being done to address their concerns, for example using 'you said, we did' posters. Involve staff and students wherever possible in defining the problems and finding solutions.
6. **Student representation**: ensure the student union has an officer with a technology enhanced learning (TEL) or digital brief; ensure digital strategy meetings include student reps; link up student reps eg library user groups, IT user groups, so they learn from one another. Involve students in working and steering groups on digital projects.

7. **Employ teaching staff and students** in TEL teams or on TEL projects eg creating resources and course materials – videos, animations, etc – developing apps and interfaces on the digital environment. This also provides a useful experience of employment for the students as well as valued outcomes for the institution.

8. Engage **teaching staff and students as co-researchers and co-developers**, collecting feedback, carrying out interviews, identifying and finding solutions to issues in the digital environment.

9. Students should be **resourced, recognised and rewarded** for engagement. Develop their skills and ensure there are rewards in terms of digital identity and reputation (open badges, entry on their HEAR record, routes to a graduate award, opportunities to be entered for a specific prize). Student bursaries can work as well as hourly payment, giving students more responsibility for specific deliverables.

10. Organise a **staff and student digital conference or event**: hackathon, digital festival, digital week, lunchtime showcase, digital identity session to recognise and celebrate staff and students’ contributions in this area.

11. **Normalise engaging students in dialogue** about their digital learning experience as part of routine course feedback and continuous improvement eg simply asking students in class for feedback on how they approached an activity that involved digital media or resources.

**Further resources**

**Links**

- Digital student cards
- Jisc Change Agents’ Network (CAN) and our Edtech student projects
- HEA Students as Partners initiative and The Student Engagement Partnership (TSEP)
- Survey evidence from our original digital student HE study and subsequent digital student FE study and digital student skills studies
» Free versions of our editable audit tool (Word doc) and checklist (Word doc) provide a good place to start on planning and reviewing your digital capabilities provision and offering prompts to help identify priorities for development.

» Our discovery tool is an empowering first step for staff and students to reflect on their digital capabilities and to identify current strengths and areas for development

» T-SPARC project ladder of engagement model