Student digital experience tracker

Insights from institutional pilots 2017

We are delighted to share with you a series of institutional insights from this year’s student digital experience tracker. With over 22,000 students from 74 organisations in the UK and over 5,000 students from 10 international universities, it is the first time the digital experience has been looked at in this detail and at this scale.

It is a useful snapshot of the state of technology-enhanced learning in UK post-compulsory education – and so we hope the findings will be useful to policymakers and education researchers – as well as educational leaders looking to improve their own provision.

The report, Student digital experience tracker 2017: the voice of 22,000 UK learners, is available from https://www.jisc.ac.uk/rd/projects/student-digital-experience-tracker together with briefings for senior leaders and curriculum staff.

The tracker is a survey tool that enables organisations to explore how students use and feel about the digital tools, environment and support they provide. It offers institutions valuable insight into how students are experiencing digitally enhanced learning, and provides an opportunity for them to engage with students with regards to issues such as the design of their curriculum and the digital environment.

These snapshots of institutional practice highlight how universities, colleges and providers have used the tracker to support the developments of their students’ digital experience. They show the different approaches institutions have used to encourage students to participate in the survey, how they are engaging students with the analysis of the data and working in partnership to take forward the resulting actions.
How did Liverpool University get a high response rate from its HE students?

- Liverpool University’s Tracker team managed to get a high response rate of 680 despite a degree of survey fatigue. Students had just taken part in a HEFCE Learning Gains survey and a local referendum on boycotting the NSS when the Tracker was launched.

- It was decided to offer an iPad as an incentive. The ‘receipt’ option was used in BOS to provide students with a unique identifying code once they had completed the survey questions. They could email the code to the Tracker team to be in with a chance of winning the iPad, without compromising the anonymity of their responses.

- Students received a personal email from the Pro Vice Chancellor for Education, backed up by the Associate PVCs in each faculty, to show that there was senior support for the initiative.

- Marketing and Communications and the Guild of Students were involved in designing student communications, and reminders were sent out on social media.

- After a ‘you said, we did’ campaign, it is hoped that students will be motivated to participate again, confident that the university is listening and responding to what they say. Tracker findings are also informing a current VLE review and an e-marking and assessment initiative, both of which will have a direct impact on the student experience.
We did not want to burden students with yet another institutional survey, so the fact that we could rely on two questions relating to EMA in the tracker survey was brilliant [for evaluating our EMA project]. We were able to get a sense from 670 students that for them, the format of feedback mattered less than the quality. This helped us make sense of both student and staff perspectives to support our action planning for EMA.

e-Learning specialist
How did the University of Adelaide engage students in dialogue about their digital experience?

- The Tracker was used in the context of a wider project to develop digital literacy and digital education at Adelaide. Students were engaged in the project in a variety of ways, for example through lunchtime ‘pizza for comment’ events that attracted many hungry students!

- Giant digital screens were used in the library and central hub to give regular updates on findings while the Tracker was still live. Students who had not yet engaged were encouraged to give their opinions, while those that had engaged could see their feedback having an immediate impact.

- Student-facing services such as the library, learning technologies, technology services and educational design took the lead, and members of teaching staff in each Faculty were engaged. This meant that students could hear about and discuss the Tracker with people they already trusted to understand their learning.

- Members of library staff used a short presentation about the Tracker in workshop sessions at the start of semester 1 to kick off conversations about digital learning.

- The project engaged students through a dedicated all-student email list, Facebook page and Twitter. Through these and the central student Hub it provided regular feedback to students on the aims and progress of the Tracker. Students on the working group also gave their views and advice.

- In the end the university recorded 1581 student responses to the Tracker survey.

- Feedback to students on the final results will be through a simple, clear visualisation, designed with student input to support further conversations. Further ‘pizza for comment’ events and focus groups are exploring key aspects of the findings.

- The project has been championed by the PVC (Student Learning) and has received great interest from all parts of the university community. A report on the findings has been requested for all student-focused university committees and a workshop will take place at the Adelaide Festival of Learning and Teaching, which has the theme Digital Future/Digital Capabilities.

- Alongside the emerging framework for digital literacy, the Tracker has allowed a new shared vocabulary to emerge with which staff and students across the University can discuss digital education.
‘The high response rate from students, who engaged very positively with the Tracker survey, will enable us to better cater for their digital needs when repositioning our services to support them. We were particularly pleased with the opportunity to incorporate students’ feedback into the drafting of our new Digital Capabilities Framework which was launched this year.’

Pro-Vice Chancellor, Student Learning
How did Epping Forest College (EFC) engage their learners as change agents?

- EFC ran a whole ‘Digital Month’ of activities with students in February 2017, with the Tracker project at its centre and many creative initiatives running alongside.

- Behind the scenes, the Tracker project was led by the Learner Voice and student survey team who already had excellent relationships with class reps and Curriculum Managers.

- Seventeen specialised Student Digital Voice Xperts (DVX) were recruited to work on the Digital Month projects and were the face of the Tracker in the college. The DVX team were involved in prior testing and feedback of the Tracker survey, dissemination throughout college, and targeting subject areas where response rates to other surveys had been low. They have also been communicating about the Tracker findings in college and beyond, for example as part of the national student Change Agents Network Conference in May 2017.

- Striking posters about DVX and the Tracker were designed by the students, separately for teaching staff (to encourage them to speak with students) and for students themselves. These were put up across the college campuses and sent out via email and social media.

- A wide range of student-friendly communication channels were used both to encourage participation and to disseminate and discuss the findings. These included: a VLE discussion forum and add-on block/image, the student blog, eTrackr noticeboard, the college website, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Smore flyers, TV screens across college, and the college app. The team also designed presentations in haikudeck that could be reused in different settings.

- Safer Internet Day fell within Digital Month and was used as a further opportunity to engage students creatively, around the slogan ‘Be the Change’. You can find out more about SID 17 at EFC here.

- Displays and interpretations of the Tracker were installed in the Learning Lounge and as part of a number of pop-up street events around the college campuses, led by learners.

- Tracker findings are now being used to inform the 2020 Digital Strategy and future investments in digital technology for learning. The College also understands the important role of peer support in students’ digital skills development and will continue to build on the appetite students have shown for supporting each other and working for change in this area.
The digital student tracker has helped Epping Forest College to improve its digital strategy around the college to improve learner experiences, even for students who have difficulty using technology.

Jake, Student

I found the digital student tracker beneficial as it allowed us to find out what technology issues and experience our peers had in the college, this way the college could make sure ongoing issues are resolved and experience improved.

Brad, Student

As the DVX we got to review the answers given by students and we see what was good about technology in the college and what could be improved.

Deividas, Student
Digital skills are going to be really important in my future career and am glad that staff really got me thinking about it and how I can develop existing skills. The college is taking an active role in supporting students to take responsibility.

Jeremy, Student
How did the University of Northampton use the Tracker to secure institutional actions and investments?

- Northampton’s use of the Tracker (in 2016 and 2017) has been in the context of a whole-institution move towards ‘Active Blended Learning’ (ABL). Initiatives have included a clear strategic direction towards digital learning, brand new teaching spaces in a new university build, and organisational research to ensure an evidence base for change.

- The Tracker findings have not arrived in a vacuum but in a space where important questions were already being asked, such as how to teach in new digitally-enriched spaces and what impact new modes of learning were having on the student experience.

- Northampton is combining data from the Tracker with longitudinal data from an annual staff survey on digital technology use, and on-going research on the student experience of ABL. These complementary projects enable the institution to achieve a balanced view and to design solutions that work for all stakeholders.

- The Students’ Union is a key partner in the Tracker project at Northampton, both in gathering data, and in analysis and follow-up. The initial survey has in both instances been followed by focus groups with students, to explore issues in more depth. Findings are also used to develop discussions with other teams across the institution, including IT services and the Changemaker Employability team.

- Actions are then agreed by a working group including SU representatives, and teams report progress to the student body via this group. This allows Northampton to respond to Tracker findings in ways that have student support and that embed accountability.

- Although the question set had changed considerably, Northampton’s team looked at the two response rates (2016 and 2017) where identical or very similar questions were asked. One of the differences they found was an increase in the number of students saying that they can create a positive online identity. This highlighted the value of work that has been done in this area since the first Tracker was run. In other areas the second Tracker confirmed and consolidated findings from the first, such as a need for better awareness of the digital support services on offer, and uncertainty around personal data.

- Northampton has run two focus groups and is combining data from the Tracker with another student survey to achieve a balanced view and to design solutions that work for all stakeholders.

- Thanks to the Tracker findings, a number of institutional actions have been initiated including:
  - new initiatives to support staff digital literacy: ‘Learntech Lunchtimes’ for staff
  - further user experience testing for online library resources
better promotion of digital support services and review of staffing at key places and times
- a review of online support services for students to develop digital skills
- moves towards a ‘software reading list’ and minimum spec for laptops
- clearer communication on file storage policies and cloud storage

- There is now evidence to support new campus design decisions, evidence to support investment in ‘digital literacy for employability’, and a clear indication of the value of digital support services to students.

Over the two years that the survey has been running we have seen the number of students that engage with the survey and focus groups increase. Aspects of the findings have fed into this year’s Academic Review, a document that makes recommendations for change and gets submitted to the University’s Student Experience Committee. It has been encouraging to see the Learn Technology Team respond so quickly to students concerns and suggestions and we hope to continue this partnership moving forward.

Samantha Wright, Student Voice Co-ordinator (Academic)
How did Bexhill Sixth Form College use the Tracker to benchmark and compare?

- Ahead of a new ILT strategy, Bexhill Sixth Form College wanted to benchmark the current student digital experience, to assess its own standing in the sector and to monitor progress in the future. Although data about the student digital experience had been gathered through ad hoc surveys before, the College team wanted to formalise the data collection process and line up with national best practice.

- The survey was administered as part of the Tutorial programme with the support of the Student ILT Representatives and teaching staff. This secured a response rate of 44%.

- Because of the high response rate, Bexhill was able to use the data to look at differences across different Sections of the College. So the grouping question was used to segment the student responses, and a detailed feedback report was provided to each Section showing comparative data across all the Sections as well as the benchmark average from across the sector.

- These reports have been used to support self-assessment on specific issues such as use of the VLE and learners’ experiences of e-assessment. Each Section has considered how they could work with other Sections to learn from best practice and make any needed improvements. Differences in provision are beginning to be ironed out.

- The central team also used the benchmarking facility within BOS to compare their findings with other FE Colleges. They were able to confirm that Bexhill is doing well on e-Safety and resource provision.

- These detailed findings have allowed the ILT Strategy group to plan future provision. There have also been actions for Section managers, teaching staff, and key support areas such as IT, and the study centre.

- The Tracker has also highlighted the need for better signposting to college digital services, and for digital issues to be covered more effectively in student inductions.

- Bexhill has really seen the benefits of having reliable data from a significant percentage of its learners, rather than having to rely on ad hoc or anecdotal evidence.
It is useful to have an indicator of comparative data to get a sense of how the sector looks... Thank you very much to the Team for running the Tracker, keeping us informed and providing support. I hope it does continue as then we can start to see trends.

Project lead
How have Durham University used free text responses to identify what students want?

- Durham generated a total of 958 responses to the standard HE Tracker survey, which was targeted at first and second year undergraduates. The team calculated that with a 7% response rate they had a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of 3.04. The sample was representative of the wider undergraduate population in terms of declared disability/health issues and gender balance. Response rates for free-text questions were between 50 and 60% - with the exception of the question about assistive technologies and apps which was addressed by 32% of relevant respondents. This gave the team confidence that the free text responses were valid evidence of undergraduate students' digital experiences and needs.

- The entire data set for the survey was imported into NVivo so that free response trends could be analysed and compared with responses to quantitative questions.

- First a word-cloud was generated based on the frequency of words appearing in the free-text responses. These words were used as an initial taxonomy against which individual responses were coded. The node taxonomy was then refined, sometimes adding new nodes, sometimes combining nodes that were found to refer to the same theme.

- Once coded, the frequency of each theme was noted. Themes appearing in each student’s responses were analysed in relation to their faculty, year of study and other demographic factors, and compared with responses to closed questions on similar themes. For example, participants who mentioned wifi issues were filtered out and their responses to the closed question on wifi was also looked at.

- When coding, the tone/nature of the feedback was also noted and many nodes were given sub-categories - Useful, Issue and Want – designed to fit with the wording of the survey questions. Again, comparisons with closed questions could be made. For example, students who answered ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the question ‘Do you have disability or health issue that affects how you study?’ were filtered into two groups to see whether there were differences in the things they found ‘Useful’, that were ‘Issues’, and that they ‘Wanted’ to be provided.

- Thirteen overarching themes emerged across all questions (listed in order of popularity):
  - Durham’s VLE: duo
  - Rationale, implementation and communication of digital learning and services generally
  - Software and infrastructure
  - Recording lectures
  - Activities and interaction
  - Reading and research
- Materials and links online
- In-class polling
- Online quizzes and tests
- Video and audio (not including recording of lectures)
- Digital literacy and skills (students and staff)
- Accessibility
- Assessment and feedback

- The results were written up in a short report, widely circulated across the University, with the subheadings 'What students find useful', 'What students want', and 'Issues students have'. Student quotes were included to illustrate each point.

- The preliminary results have already been used to inform University decision making in several areas:
  - Consider options for lecture capture – Tracker data used to support an existing business case.
  - Expand the use of in-class polling with mobile devices and laptops.
  - Standardise practice around providing lecture materials online.
  - Evaluate a study of assessment and feedback processes, informed by responses to the Tracker survey.
  - Identify effective practice which can be promoted through the University’s inclusive learning working group.

- The report findings will also be discussed during special sessions of the University’s annual Learning and Teaching conference later this summer.
When a thousand students take time to provide you with feedback, you know that the issues are important. The findings from the 2017 JISC digital tracker project are timely – Durham is implementing a new education strategy, and this survey will help us design a new digital learning environment. The quantitative and qualitative findings are valuable; there is no substitute for direct expressions of student voice.

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education)
How did ACL Essex use the Tracker successfully with ACL (Adult and Community Learning) and WBL (Work-Based Learning) learners?

- ACL Essex are beginning to develop a digital strategy for ACL and WBL learners, and to embed digital skills into their courses. They decided to use the Tracker to find out how they are currently meeting these learners’ needs. They also wanted a blueprint for staff development, as few of their ACL/WBL tutors are fully confident with digital learning methods.

- The Governors, Senior Management Team, Curriculum Co-ordinators, Business Improvement Officer for Quality, ECC IS Technical Manager, Tutors and Learner Forum reps have all been involved in and committed to the Tracker project.

- There are real problems engaging learners who are studying in different centres and workplaces, and to different timetables. The Tracker was publicised on social media, the VLE and website, with a shortcut link to the survey on all classroom computers. Posters were put up in learning centres and classrooms, with a QR code to take students straight to the Tracker link on their own devices. Email was used to target groups of learners, and tutors were asked to encourage completion in tutorial time. Crucially, an iPad was offered as a prize.

- These communications were followed up with regular reminders and – once the survey had closed – with feedback on the results and responses. ACL Essex achieved a remarkable 470 completed surveys from ACL and WBL learners.

- Thanks to this high response rate the Tracker findings have been ‘very useful’ for informing the digital strategy. There were areas in which the Tracker could have been better adapted for adult learners, such as the age ranges used to segment learner groups. But overall the provider feels they could not have delivered anything like the Tracker using their own resources.

- ACL Essex now has a small task group working on the findings. The team were pleased to learn that over 60% of their learners were using digital resources in their learning, but concerned that 75% didn’t feel their course prepared them to work in a digital world. (This is very comparable to learners in other sectors). The task group have produced a report and action plan, explaining to learners how things will change as a result of their participation. Digital skills are now being embedded into all curriculum areas, and the Tracker will continue to be used to monitor any impact.
It gave us an opportunity to find out what our learners really think about their digital skills, rather than what we think we know.

Project lead
How was the Tracker used across a consortium of University Colleges in London?

- The **Bloomsbury Group of Colleges** based in central London, used the Tracker as part of a shared enhancement project on the digital capabilities of staff and students.

- The aims for the Tracker were to engage students at the start of the initiative, and to develop recommendations, strategies and practices that could be shared across the partner colleges.

- Prior to the Tracker, partner colleges had taken ad hoc approaches to gathering information about the student digital experience, such as picking out relevant free text responses from national survey data, and carrying out one-off consultations on specific issues. The Tracker was an opportunity to do this systematically, and in a comparable, replicable way.

- Different colleges wanted to target different groups of learners, but they felt that central management of the project would work in everyone’s interests. Because TBC already had a highly successful collaboration with the **Bloomsbury Learning Environment** (BLE), it was decided that the project should be overseen by the BLE manager. A shared Advisory Board was also established, with representatives from across the consortium, including students from each college.

- The consortium approach allowed all the colleges to benefit from a common learner engagement strategy. This was carried forward via email, social media, Student Union representatives and student ambassadors. A link to the Tracker survey was featured prominently on the BLE home page. Student learning technologists were also crucial to getting the word out.

- A single version of the HE Tracker was used across all the colleges, with the customisable question on student groups being used to identify which college respondents belonged to. This had the advantage of producing a high volume of data across the consortium, with easy segmentation of the data into college groups for local analysis. The other customisable questions related to Moodle (which all partners use as their VLE) and online assessment and feedback (which had been the previous enhancement project).

- The consortium approach also created efficiencies when it came to analysing the data. A workshop was held with members from each partner institution, including members of the Advisory Board. Attendees worked together in small groups focusing on their own institution, and comparing these results against the whole consortium. They then compared the consortium’s combined results with the wider sector. Findings are being used to inform digital capability development in each College and to support further developments of the BLE.
Taking part in the Jisc Digital Student Tracker has been a really valuable experience for the Bloomsbury Learning Environment consortium. It provided us with a ready-to-use tool, which we've used to find out how digitally confident our students are without expending time to develop our own survey. The combined consortium results will enable us to consider new ways to collaboratively address any common gaps in students' understanding. Individually, our member institutions can benchmark themselves against each other and the wider sector.

BLE Service Manager

We were delighted to have the opportunity to take part in this research. We believe that giving students an opportunity to reflect on the ways in which they are engaging with digital technologies is core to their development as digitally capable,
independent learners. We also look forward to making use of the survey results as we review and enhance our support.”

Learning Technologist

Completing the Digital Student Survey was a really interesting experience as it gave me the opportunity to stand back and think about how I use technology to support my learning. It made me realise that although I feel quite confident in my own use of tech (e.g. taking notes in lectures in Word and OneNote), I would really like to know what my peers are doing in case I can learn new ways of learning online.

Gateway Student
How was the Tracker used to support an international, cross-university research project?

- A group of five universities in South Africa – led by the University of Cape Town (UCT) – used the Tracker to collect student data as part of a Personal Mobile Devices project.

- The main reason for using the Tracker was to benefit from an existing, internationally-recognised survey tool to assess the digital experience of students. Without it the project team would have had to develop, trial and validate a completely new research instrument. Once the team had examined the Tracker survey they liked its brevity and strong focus on learning with digital tools, and felt it would complement their existing research.

- Data from the Tracker (in conjunction with other data gathering methods, such as focus group discussions) is now being used to evaluate how access to personal mobile devices improves the learning experience of otherwise disadvantaged students, and how it allows lecturers to adapt their teaching to make increased use of digital technologies.

- Unlike at Bloomsbury, UCT decided to set up a different Tracker version for each of the five universities. This was to get around the data security issues that would arise from sharing student responses across institutions with no existing data sharing arrangements in place. The BOS team helped to create a new benchmarking group so that it would be possible within the BOS system to see how the five institutions compared with one another.

- The five surveys were clones of one another to ensure exactly the same questions were delivered to each group of students. Each university was responsible for ensuring the highest possible completion rate among the target population of students: the 450 students (across the institutions) who had been given mobile devices as part of the project.

- The survey was run at the start of the 2017 academic year in South Africa, which happened to be towards the end of the Tracker project. Project participants were sent emails over the course of three weeks with a 3 day, 2 day and final day reminder. Course convenors were asked to remind, prompt and follow up with students, setting aside class time if possible. In addition participants were also reminded via “WhatsApp” a local IM tool used in the South African context. Mobile phone vouchers were offered as an incentive too: 10 students would be selected to win a gigabyte of data.

- The target students had already been supported in their digital practice the previous year. They knew there was national interest in the project (it is funded by the South African Government’s Department of Higher Education and Training) and that the findings would support other disadvantaged students. There was therefore a high level of personal commitment to take part and a high response rate. At one institution with 25 student participants, all but one completed the Tracker survey.
• The project lead at UCT collaborated closely with the Jisc team to design the customisable questions, so that key research issues could be explored alongside standard Tracker questions without compromising the experience of the user. Customisable questions focused on the role mobile devices had played in allowing students to stay in touch with their studies during the spate of student protests and university shut downs in 2016.

• Once the surveys had closed, each university downloaded a .csv file for analysis and these were combined to give a data set across the project as a whole. This has been triangulated with other project data to support the overall evaluation.

• Senior managers such as Vice Chancellors, Directors of e-Learning and Deans of Higher Education Development have been involved at all five universities and are considering what the results mean for the student body as a whole. The project team has also been very interested to compare their findings, as the five universities are working in very different contexts and with very different levels of student disadvantage.

We have used many surveys over the years to try and understand students’ access to and use of ICTs for learning. The challenge has always been length and relevance to students in our context. Tracker was quick and easy for students to participate in but still focused enough for us to gain valuable
relevant data for our university and project context. I will
definitely suggest we roll it our more widely.

Project lead

Students commented the University “must make sure even the
poor students have access” and must never use software etc
that costs students as “we cannot afford any types of
payments”. However amidst these constraints we are
encouraged never to “Take it lightly because it makes everything
easier”. So the value of digital teaching and learning is clearly
evident.

Project participant
How did RMIT (Melbourne, Australia) use the Tracker to find out more about students’ digital learning?

• RMIT, a university in Melbourne, Australia, has begun a process of integrating all its data sets (e.g. student grades, survey results, Learning Management System activities) to develop a fuller picture of students’ experience and their path through their studies.

• Student identification data has to be common across these data sets in order for them to be integrated. The default for the Tracker is to collect anonymous data, but with the help of the Tracker team, RMIT were able to set up three unlocked versions of the survey (for Higher Education, Vocational Education and online learners) with student numbers and email addresses added in ‘invisible’ question fields. This allowed data matching behind the scenes without compromising the anonymity of the responses.

• RMIT are now able to use their Tracker data (n= 530) as part of their big data project. They are also applying advanced statistical techniques to the Tracker data itself, to understand more about the relationships among different factors in the student digital experience. For example they are considering whether students’ confidence with different digital skills influences how they feel about digital technology used in their learning. The Jisc team are involved in this work, which will be of interest beyond RMIT.

• Through structural equations modelling with the integrated data set, Tracker data can now be used alongside evidence of student outcomes and satisfaction to identify the impact of various aspects of digital learning.

• RMIT is currently changing its institutional VLE. The 2017 Tracker data provides a pre-transition snapshot of students’ use of the current VLE, and when the data is collected again next year it will be possible to see if student digital learning activities have changed with the new VLE.

• In future RMIT hopes to use Tracker data alongside data from the VLE to identify students at risk of dropping out of their courses. Tracker data may help to identify key factors in the digital experience that relate to student retention overall.
The Tracker will enable RMIT to not only gather students’ expectations and experiences of technology but plan and develop appropriate future learning and service experiences. It is incredibly useful for targeting resources where they are most needed. An added bonus is that we get a view of the student experience we have not had before. The Tracker also enables us to demonstrate how we are improving the learner experience.

DVC Education and Vice President
How did Nottingham Ningbo overcome initial resistance to make the Tracker an on-going project?

- Nottingham Ningbo has been involved in both pilots of the Tracker and on both occasions the project lead met with some resistance. With 90% of its student population being based and brought up in China, UNNC students are not always comfortable about providing personal information and opinions online. The structures for staff and students to have a strong voice in their learning experience or in IT provision are still developing in this relatively young institution (13 years).

- However, the project has gained respect and support over its two iterations. This year 488 students responded to the survey and many also attended focus groups. These explored their support needs, their sources of satisfaction with digital learning, and what helps them to feel engaged.

- In the first iteration of the Tracker, some students would only submit their answers in a paper-based format which then had to be typed up and entered into BOS. This time the team were able to run an email campaign and embed the survey into Moodle. As soon as responses started to come in, posters were printed with word clouds showing favourite digital tools, and QR codes so that more students could contribute. There was also a WeChat campaign.

- Findings of the Tracker have been presented to the Campus Teaching Committee and Tri Campus Executive Board. They include:
  - students find Moodle useful but want clearer navigation through course materials and regular updates
  - favourite digital activities are in-class quizzes and lecture response systems followed by bitesize video content
  - students are not fully aware of the services provided by the university, such as file space, backup and filesharing
  - there is little understanding of online safety and student digital skills are patchy

- In addition to the greater student engagement this time, it has been possible to monitor changes in student responses to some common questions. Ningbo is now looking for opportunities to run the Tracker on an annual basis.
Despite some resistance and the fact that our students are over-surveyed, senior management were genuinely interested in the outcomes. We are now planning the development of an extra-curricular digital skills module, to be designed with students and run by students. We have identified gaps in student support that we will seek to address.

Project lead
How is the University of Derby using the Tracker to support curriculum change in HE?

- Derby’s use of the Tracker was designed to support a new TEL strategy 2017-2021, which includes the aim for digital capabilities to be embedded and practiced across the curriculum. The Tracker project was championed by the Pro Vice-Chancellor Student Experience, Head of Student Experience and the Dean of Learning Enhancement, and led by the Digital Derby Steering Group in the context of this new strategy.
- All programmes across all colleges of the university are in the process of reviewing their digital practice. This provided an opportunity and an incentive for institutional promotion of the HE Tracker, so as to have local data to work with. Academic and student digital champions were involved in raising awareness.
- With a good and representative response rate from undergraduates, Derby was able to identify some quick wins from its Tracker findings, especially concerning the digital environment and networks. However, the value of the project is emerging over the longer term, as the findings on digital learning are analysed and become embedded into teaching practice.
- Analysis has focused on responses to
  - questions 6 and 7, about students’ digital activities on course and in their own study time
  - questions 8-10, about students’ feelings and beliefs about digital learning
  - questions 11 and 12 that refer to digital learning and teaching
  - customised questions on the VLE
- Free text responses were analysed using word frequency (word sift), then coding statements to arrive at a number of key issues, with frequency noted.
- These findings have been used to understand the current maturity of the digital curriculum and to make recommendations to course leaders, specifically around:
  - More consistent use of the digital learning environment
  - More use of interactivity and communication tools
  - Less reliance on PowerPoint
  - Preparing students for the digital tools they will use to study
- These recommendations are being backed up with workshops and development materials.
- Significant resource and time is available through the new TEL strategy to shift digital practice across the institution. These Tracker results provide the evidence needed to promote and see through real changes. Students will not just be presented with an outcome of survey data, but will see the results as part of an enhancement action plan to improve their digital experience at the University.

We’re recognised across the sector for delivering a brilliant student experience, and key to this now is the digital student experience.

Pro-Vice Chancellor
How did Ulster University come back from a low response rate to run a successful Tracker the second time around?

- Ulster University has an 18-year record in institutional e-learning services, dating from its time as a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. It has run a number of successful Jisc projects and has in the past carried out student surveys on ‘using technology in learning and teaching’. However, it was felt that using a sector-wide instrument would lend credibility to the results.

- In 2016 the University signed up to run the first Tracker pilot with a particular focus on institution-wide approaches to learning spaces and active pedagogies. Despite a committed project lead, the target population was narrow and response rates reflected the smaller sample. Ulster was, at the time, progressing with two institutional wide projects - Learning Landscapes and Digital Futures - one aligned to physical spaces and one to virtual spaces. The Tracker, in 2016, was initiated to add to the institutional conversations about physical spaces and the design of new buildings and although the figures were not large, they were similar enough to the national benchmark for the project lead to feel justified in referencing that data internally. Tracker questions were also used to help plan student focus groups ahead of a major redevelopment of the Belfast campus [http://www.futurebelfast.com/university-of-ulster-belfast-campus.html](http://www.futurebelfast.com/university-of-ulster-belfast-campus.html)

- In 2017 the focus of the Digital Futures project shifted from infrastructure to academic development and student engagement. The new Tracker questions seemed well adapted to asking about these issues. Ulster signed up again to run the Tracker and this time committed resources to both a communication strategy and student engagement approaches. A dedicated website was constructed to promote the Tracker and student-facing social media channels were used to push traffic to the website. Students had the opportunity of entering a draw for iTunes vouchers and a web application was developed to randomly select one student per day over a 10-day promotional window. The Tracker was promoted by class reps through their own formal and informal communication channels, and was presented on each of Ulster’s four campuses by members of the Students’ Union.

- Thanks to the level of student engagement the project collected a respectable 340 responses. Ulster based its target population on the active users logged in Ulster’s Digital Learning Environment over the 30 days before the survey closed (24000). Ulster’s confidence interval from the response rate was therefore 5.30%.

- Responses have been analysed and reported to the Digital Learning Sub Committee (DLSC) from where they have been passed through the Learning and Teaching Committee, covering all Deans, Heads of School and Central Department representatives. Teaching and Learning Coordinators are tasked with embedding the findings into each Faculty, for example by running workshops and initiating local plans.

- This work continues to have an impact on digital change at Ulster and beyond. Members of the Tracker
team recently presented on ‘developing organisational approaches to digital capabilities’ at a Jisc Connect More event in Belfast. They shared the importance of linking the Tracker to practical curriculum interventions and to a credible institutional strategy.

I cannot over emphasise how much more credible these results are perceived by senior stakeholders in comparison to local surveys. The Tracker has exceeded my expectations in terms of benefits, I have already cherry picked aspects for business cases and papers. Incredibly useful for us and we will definitely continue to participate if there is an opportunity.

Head of the Office for Digital Learning, Ulster University
How has the University of Stirling changed its approach to student feedback?

- The University of Stirling has recently embarked upon a collaborative project, working in partnership with the Students’ Union, which saw them utilise the Jisc/NUS student digital experience benchmarking tool to help shape its Digital Strategy.

- In 2016, the University’s Information Services directorate enhanced its approach to student feedback in an effort to reduce the number of ad hoc surveys and consultations being undertaken, and to ensure students are able to see how their feedback is being used. This involved:
  - Regular use of UX methodologies such as a graffiti wall, love/break-up letters, which provided students with the opportunity to provide feedback on what they loved and wanted improved, and focus groups (as also recommended in Jisc Tracker Guidance)
  - Pop-up consultation events across campus
  - Greater use of social media
  - Fewer surveys, which allowed a greater focus on those with strategic importance, such as the NSS and the Jisc Student Digital Experience Tracker

- The Tracker survey opened to all undergraduates in November 2016, with incentives offered in return for participation, and collected 554 responses. It provided invaluable feedback from students on: how they wanted digital technologies to be used in learning and teaching, how they used their digital environment and how they felt it could be improved. The findings were analysed by a working group that included staff with expertise in BOS and SPSS.

- The Tracker results were reported directly to the Digital Learning Steering Group, which included a representative from Stirling Students’ Union, and the findings were put to use in a number of ways:
  - to inform the procurement specification for a new digital learning ecosystem
  - to provide a benchmark against which the success of that new ecosystem will be evaluated
  - to demonstrate how the new digital learning environment has been directly influenced by student feedback
Through pop-up events, social media and innovative new UX methods, we’re securing feedback from a wider range of students. The Jisc Student Digital Experience Tracker complements these approaches perfectly, and we’re using this combined data to drive tangible improvements in direct response to student feedback.

Head of Customer Service

By working in partnership with Information Services, we’ve been able to embed the voice of our students in shaping the development and implementation of the University's Digital Strategy... The Jisc Student Digital Experience Tracker was an
invaluable tool in helping us integrate a sense of authentic student engagement, steering our work to bring about innovation and enhancement to Stirling's digital ecosystem.

Vice President Education, Students’ Union

How to get involved

Jisc will be running the 2018 tracker survey from October 2017 and if you are interested in participating please complete the expression of interest form available from http://bit.ly/trackersignup18

To follow the developments of the tracker:

• Visit the project page https://www.jisc.ac.uk/rd/projects/student-digital-experience-tracker
• Join the tracker mailing list http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/jisc-digitalstudent-tracker
• Follow #digitalstudent and @jisc on Twitter