Professional services staff digital experience insights survey 2020

UK higher education (HE) survey findings

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Note: percentages may have totals that do not add up to 100%. This is due to rounding.
QUOTE FROM PROFESSIONAL SERVICES STAFF MEMBER:
“Provide case studies of best practice. Sometimes we are aware of the technology but maybe not confident about how it works in practice.”
Valuing all staff

Professional services staff fulfil a broad range of roles and responsibilities, yet what they have in common is the contribution they make to the overall digital experience of many. Our findings are a first step in understanding and valuing the full range of these contributions and the support staff need as they play their part in ensuring wider organisational success.

This year, 3,234 professional services staff from 13 UK universities took part in our professional services staff digital experience insights survey. The survey was conducted between October 2019 and June 2020.

The professional services staff survey findings for 2020 build on the rich picture obtained from our surveys of students¹ and teaching staff².

This year has been very different to others and for some professional services staff, this may have been their first experience of remote working, accessing essential systems from home and where support from colleagues may have been disrupted.

Key observations that stand out from the 2020 professional services staff survey findings are that:

- Despite overlapping responsibilities, the cultural differences between professional services staff and teaching staff make it even more important that all views are heard and that there is equity – a ‘stronger together’ approach will benefit all

- As for teaching staff and students, context is important, it is just that the specific context may be different for professional services staff

- Access to the right devices, software and systems is vital, as is support for skills development

Professional services staff are motivated to use technology – many of the processes they manage rely on this. They perhaps use a more mandated range of technologies and operate in a less publicly ‘risky’ environment than teaching staff who may be encouraged to experiment more. Investing in their digital experience will pay larger dividends and enable them to better support students and teaching staff.

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a unique factor this year. 83% of professional services staff who completed the survey did so before the 23 March 2020 and the move to off campus provision; 17% completed it on or after this date. This has allowed us to partition the data and provide an initial comparison, giving a brief summary where the differences were found to be statistically significant. It is important to remember that while the impact of COVID-19 may have influenced some responses in terms of perceptions and attitudes, opinions generally take longer to form so it would be methodologically unsound to assume that responses relate specifically to before or after 23 March 2020.

¹ Learner digital experience insights survey 2020: UK higher education (HE) survey findings (digitalinsights.jisc.ac.uk/reports-and-briefings/our-reports/)

² Teaching staff digital experience insights survey 2020: UK higher education (HE) survey findings (digitalinsights.jisc.ac.uk/reports-and-briefings/our-reports/)
Theme one: you and your technology

Theme one explores what access to devices professional services staff have, both personally owned as well as those provided by their organisation. In theme one, we also look at use of, and support for use of, assistive technologies and how confident staff are in using technology.

Use of organisationally and personally owned devices for work

In terms of organisationally owned devices, many staff used desktops and laptops. Far fewer used tablets and smartphones.

Some staff also used personally owned devices for work – most notably smartphones and laptops. It is vital that staff have access to the organisationally owned devices they need for their role and that staff working across campuses or in multiple locations have access to the devices wherever they work.

Organisationally owned

- 65% desktop
- 60% laptop
- 17% tablet
- 16% smartphone
- 4% none of these

Personally owned

- 15% desktop
- 32% laptop
- 15% tablet
- 59% smartphone
- 29% none of these

Use of assistive technologies

Professional services staff were asked about their use of four specific assistive technologies: screen readers, dictation, alternative input devices and screen magnification. While 92% said that they didn’t use any of these named technologies they may have used others. With varied roles, some directly supporting others, it is vital that all staff have a knowledge and awareness of assistive technologies so they can promote the benefits more widely.

- 7% of professional services staff used at least one of four named assistive technologies
- Only 38% of staff who used at least one of them said their organisation had offered support to do so
- Only 19% of all professional services staff said their organisation had offered support (irrespective of whether they used any of four named technologies)

How actively do professional services staff help others to develop their digital skills?

Sharing effective practice and learning from colleagues is established practice for many and a good way of building capacity and collaboration. 91% of professional services staff said they helped others at least sometimes. Encouraging more confident users to support others in developing their digital practices is cost effective, especially when directly linked to role and context.

- 35% often
- 56% sometimes
- 9% never
QUOTE FROM PROFESSIONAL SERVICE STAFF MEMBER:
“I have a colleague in my office who is quite digitally savvy, so she sometimes shows me how to do things. For the most part though, I feel like I have to figure out my own way and I probably don't derive as much value as I could from the tools available to me.”

Attitudes and confidence in using technology
The attitude of professional services staff in using technology was very positive and confidence levels reasonably high suggesting that targeting those who gave neutral responses or where not confident with practical, role-related support could be beneficial.

Attitudes
- 98% said they either enjoyed trying out new and innovative technologies or were comfortable using mainstream technologies
- Only 2% preferred not to use technology unless they had to

Confidence
- 79% were either ‘very’ or ‘quite confident’ at trying out new technologies
- 14% gave a neutral response
- 8% were either ‘not very’ or ‘not at all’ confident
Theme two: technology at your organisation

The questions asked in theme two help us to understand how professional services staff experience the digital environment provided by their organisation. This includes the quality of organisational digital provision and support, access to essential services and systems and the opportunity to be involved in shaping their working digital environment.

Quality of organisational digital provision

Nearly two-thirds of professional services staff gave a positive rating for their organisation’s digital provision but responses to questions about specific aspects of organisational support and provision were less positive and are likely to impact on efficient working practices.

Software, hardware, and learning environment

- **65%** – rated it as either ‘best imaginable’, ‘excellent’ or ‘good’
- **26%** – average
- **10%** – ‘poor’, ‘awful’ or ‘worst imaginable’

Access to essential systems and support

Not all staff had access to systems and support many would regard as essential:

- **89%** – file storage and backup
- **84%** – reliable, on demand wifi
- **71%** – online skills training resources

Lower than expected numbers of staff agreed they had access to:

- **71%** – online systems and services from anywhere (22% neutral, 7% disagreed)
- **32%** – support to use their own digital devices (50% neutral, 17% disagreed)

Working practices and collaboration

- **66%** – agreed their organisation communicated effectively online (25% neutral, 9% disagreed)
- **52%** – agreed their organisation provided a good online environment for collaboration (37% neutral, 11% disagreed)

Systems used at work

The numbers of staff who agreed that the systems used at work were reliable, up to date, easy to navigate and/or well designed; high numbers gave neutral responses or disagreed.

- **57%** – reliable (29% neutral, 14% disagreed)
- **32%** - up to date (46% neutral, 22% disagreed)
- **29%** – easy to navigate (44% neutral, 28% disagreed)
- **26%** – well designed (47% neutral, 27% disagreed)

Involving staff in decisions about digital services

- Only **16%** agreed they had an opportunity to be involved
- **46%** gave a neutral response
- **38%** disagreed

Very few staff agreed that they had an opportunity to be involved in decisions about digital services. The mixed ratings given generally about organisational technology suggest that greater involvement from professional services staff would benefit all stakeholders.

QUOTE FROM PROFESSIONAL SERVICE STAFF MEMBER:

“Develop a remote desktop environment that has full functionality and allows full working when not in the office.”
Theme three: technology in your role

In theme three we discover more about the digital practices, tools and apps that professional services staff use and their frequency of use. We also find out how motivated they are to use technology.

**Motivation to use technology in your role**
The ratings are high with 88% of professional services staff having said they were either very or quite motivated.

- 45% very motivated
- 43% quite motivated
- 9% neutral
- 2% not very motivated
- 0% not at all motivated

**Job roles and responsibilities**
The term ‘professional services staff’ covers a broad variety of responsibilities as shown here:

- 37% supported the use of digital resources
- 37% supported the use of digital systems
- 31% supported students/staff with their digital skills
- 17% trialled technology innovation projects
- 12% taught students
- 43% none of these

**Who supports you most to use technology in your work role?**

- 57% colleagues
- 23% support staff
- 18% online videos and resources
- 2% friends and family

**Frequency of digital practices**
The percentage of professional services staff who said they carried out the following activities weekly or more frequently was:

- 63% worked online with others (25% monthly or less, 12% never)
- 58% worked with data eg analysis, visualisation (32% monthly or less, 10% never)
- 23% provided online support (25% monthly or less, 52% never)
- 11% produced online guidance materials (47% monthly or less, 42% never)
- 7% ran live training or workshops (33% monthly or less, 60% never)

**Useful digital tools and apps for work**
2,082 responses from professional services staff were received. The top four most cited tools or apps were:

- Live video platforms like MS Teams, Skype, Zoom and Collaborate
- General productivity systems/suites (Microsoft applications, Office, Office 365, Outlook, Excel, Word, PowerPoint and SharePoint)
- Collaborative productivity tools (OneDrive, OneNote, Trello)
- Social media tools although email remains the most popular tool for communication

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**Quote from professional service staff member:**

“I would love to know how best to use certain tools/applications specifically in relation to my role not just in a general way.”
Theme four: developing your digital skills

Theme four is all about the opportunities and support professional services staff have to develop their digital skills and practice, safety and legal considerations, their own wellbeing and that of others.

Overall quality of organisational support to develop digital skills
Less than half of staff rated the overall quality of support as either ‘excellent’, ‘best imaginable’ or ‘good’. The mean average response was ‘good’ but the median average response was ‘average’.

- 47% rated it as either ‘excellent’, ‘best imaginable’ or ‘good’
- 36% ‘average’
- 17% ‘poor’, ‘awful’ or ‘worst imaginable’

Support and guidance for digital skills development
Responses to these multiple-choice questions were varied. Although the majority said they received support to develop their basic IT skills only a third agreed that their organisation provided guidance about the digital skills they needed in their job role. High numbers disagreed to statements on other aspects of guidance.

Support
The percentages who said their organisation offered support to develop specific digital skills were:

- 80% – develop their basic IT skills
- 44% – online team working
- 38% – use of specialist software
- 27% – manage public web pages
- 25% – data analysis skills
- 21% – creation of digital learning materials
- 15% – managing professional digital identity

Guidance

- 33% – organisation provided guidance about the digital skills they needed in their job role (46% neutral, 21% disagreed)
- 22% – had time to explore new digital tools and approaches (44% neutral, 34% disagreed)
- 16% – had the chance to assess their digital skills, for example, for career planning (46% neutral, 38% disagreed)
- Only 8% – received reward and recognition for the digital skills they developed (41% neutral, 51% disagreed)

Wellbeing, safety and legal considerations
Most professional services staff agreed they were informed about keeping learner data safe, although far fewer agreed about other aspects of wellbeing, safety and legal requirements and high numbers gave neutral responses. The percentages who agreed were:

- 76% – keeping learner data safe under GDPR (19% neutral, 4% disagreed)
- 59% – equality and accessibility legislation (30% neutral, 10% disagreed)
- 55% – behaving safely and respectfully online (34% neutral, 11% disagreed)
- 44% – their health and wellbeing as a technology user (36% neutral, 19% disagreed)
- 41% – digital copyright and licensing (42% neutral, 17% disagreed)
Discussing digital skills
Just over half of professional services staff discussed digital skills development in informal discussions with managers, but there is potential to improve this at some of the more formal settings of recruitment, induction/onboarding and appraisals. Worryingly, 17% said they didn't discuss their digital skills development in any of these situations. Having these discussions is essential given the extent of technology used in most working practices, Digital discussions took place in the following settings:

- 53% in informal discussions with managers
- 45% when recruited
- 42% in meetings with colleagues
- 38% at appraisals
- 25% in staff meetings/CPD sessions
- 20% at induction/onboarding
- 17% none of these

What one thing should your organisation do to develop your digital skills?
A sample of the 2,007 responses showed that professional services staff asked for more:

- 31% training
- 17% time
- 9% software/systems
- 8% IT and specialist support
- 7% improve productivity

Quote from professional service staff member:
“Talk about it! I have no idea what the desired standard of digital literacy is. I don't know whether I meet the standard or fall short.”
COVID-19: early signs of impact and change

We analysed the responses gathered from professional services staff to all questions both before and on/or after lockdown on 23 March to look for early signs of change and impact, however small. The percentage values shown in this section will differ from the values overall as we are viewing them at a granular level using subsets of the data. We found the following statistically significant differences in responses when comparing the responses before and on/or after 23 March, as well as some positive shifts in usage and attitudes:

Theme one: you and your technology

Use of personally owned devices for work

There was a rise in use of personally owned laptops and a reduction in those who said they used none of four named devices (desktops, laptops, tablets and/or smartphones):

- 9% rise – use of laptops
- 7% reduction – none of these

Use of organisationally owned devices for work

Not all organisationally owned devices were available during lockdown. The number who said they used none of these rose by 5%:

- 12% reduction – use of tablets
- 12% reduction – use of desktops

Confidence in trying out new technologies

Confidence declined overall.

- 5% reduction – very or quite confident
- 4% rise – neutral
- 2% rise – not very or not at all confident

Theme two: technology at your organisation

Access to essential systems and support

Access to online systems increased but online skills training was less available:

- 9% reduction – access to online skills training resources
- 5% rise – ‘let’s you access online systems and services from anywhere’

Working practices and collaboration

- 12% rise in ‘provides a good online environment for collaboration’

Systems used at work

- 7% more staff agreed that the systems they regularly used at work were reliable and there was a substantial drop in the number who disagreed
Theme three: technology in your work

Job roles and responsibilities
- 4% rise – taught students

Frequency of digital practices
There were rises in the weekly or more frequent engagement of professional services staff for three of the five named practices:
- 23% rise – work online with others
- 4% rise – produce online guidance materials
- 11% rise – provide online support

Who supports you most to use technology in your work role?
More staff turned to support staff than colleagues during lockdown:
- 9% reduction – colleagues
- 10% rise – support staff

Theme four: developing your digital skills

Organisational support and guidance for digital skills development
Overall, fewer staff were offered support during lockdown:
- 8% rise – online team working
- 3% rise – guidance about the digital skills you need in your role
- 18% reduction – basic IT skills
- 14% reduction – manage public web pages
- 11% reduction – data analysis skills
- 7% reduction – use of specialist software

Feeling well informed on wellbeing, safety and legal aspects of practice
There were positive shifts with more staff who agreed they were well informed:
- 23% rise – your health and wellbeing as a technology user
- 17% rise – behaving safely and respectfully online
- 10% rise – equality and accessibility legislation
- 9% rise – keeping student data safe under GDPR
- 7% rise – digital copyright and licensing

Discussing digital skills
There was a rise in the number of professional services staff who said they had discussed their digital skills in just one of the six settings:
- 8% rise – at induction/onboarding
Get involved
See the digital experience through the eyes of your students and staff

Sign up to take part in our 2020/21 surveys

The 2020/21 digital experience insights surveys for students, teaching staff, professional services staff and researchers are now open, so if you are interested in participating in our surveys contact us at help@jisc.ac.uk putting ‘digital insights’ in the email subject line.

Find out more at:
digitalinsights.jisc.ac.uk

Read the full survey report which includes a question by question analysis of findings from professional services staff in UK further and higher education.

Contact your account manager

Let’s work together to transform your digital experience

https://Jisc.ac.uk/contact/your-account-manager
Teaching and learning reimagined: a new dawn for higher education

Learning and teaching reimagined is a sector-wide initiative focused on providing university leaders with inspiration on what the future might hold for higher education and guidance on how to respond with practical tools to develop your plans. The flagship learning and teaching reimagined report is now available, the result of a five-month initiative to explore the future of digital learning and teaching involving high levels of engagement with sector leaders, staff and students.

Visit: jisc.ac.uk/learning-and-teaching-reimagined

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