A journey of digital development for higher education students

The concept of a digital development journey is one where opportunities to discuss and develop digital skills are embedded in all stages of the learning experience. It recognises that students will arrive with a diverse array of skills and experiences and helps them to take charge of their own digital development.

Providing and signposting these opportunities throughout the overall learning journey will enable students to revisit topics, grow capability and confidence, expand knowledge, deepen understanding and foster independent learning.

Stages of student engagement

It begins at the first point of contact, before students start their studies with you, when you have opportunities to:

- Tell students how technology will be used in their studies, how it will be used to support them, the value of the experiences they will have and the skills they will develop
- Explain the relevance of the digital aspects of their learning to their future career plans
- Suggest or provide digital skills development activities that students can engage in while they are waiting to start their courses
- Invite students to self-assess their digital skills and explore opportunities to develop these prior to course commencement
- Given that so many university students have a laptop you may consider suggesting a suitable spec prior to their arrival and providing details of any loans and bursaries available

It turns into a commitment on induction when you:

- Reiterate and extend the information you gave at the beginning, illustrating this with real-life examples relevant to subjects being studied
- Provide initial training on how to access systems and resources, legal aspects and wellbeing
- Signpost the different support options (online guidance and resources, the people and roles who provide support for digital skills development)
- Encourage students to self-assess their digital capabilities and present them with opportunities to discuss their development needs and aspirations – our discovery tool can support them to do this and our digital capabilities role profile for learners helps students to see how they might use digital skills in their learning
- Identify student skills gaps and map these to subject demands – plan to address these in curricula activities
- Outline how ongoing discussions about digital capabilities, digital wellbeing and GDPR will be woven into curricula activities

It is important at this stage not to make support and guidance too overwhelming – there are plenty of opportunities to develop this throughout curriculum, tutorial and independent study time. Revisiting topics at key times will extend knowledge and deepen understanding.

Continue to signpost and embed digital skills development throughout their studies

- Include digital development conversations as part of regular curricula activities – with lecturers, with tutorial, learning resource, student support and careers teams
- Embed learning on essential topics within curricula with appropriate subject-related examples to make the importance and relevance of topics like GDPR, digital wellbeing and online identity come alive for students and ensure they know how to safeguard themselves when visible online
- Actively promote the resources and support that you provide – not just once but on a regular basis, timing specific topics to coincide with relevant curriculum activities and national initiatives where possible (eg student union campaigns)
- Foster independent digital development and encourage students to look beyond the resources and guidance their lecturers provide
- Some subjects may require access to specialist software – ensure training and support for these is built in with opportunities to develop these skills further with each new task or assignment
- Encourage students to share their digital skills and knowledge with others

Recognise, celebrate and reward digital achievements on completion of studies

- Acknowledge and celebrate digital skills development. There are many opportunities to do so and these are generally good promotional activities for the organisation too. Digital badges, internal awards and special occasions linked to external schemes (eg the discovery tool, idea.org.uk) are some examples
- Make sure that digital developments are promoted in digital portfolios and career planning
- Recognise too the input and value of those who support others (eg student champions/ambassadors and academic and support staff)
- Consider engaging alumni to promote the value and relevance of digital capabilities beyond their study and to support career progression

If you have any questions, or would like more help, please contact us at help@jisc.ac.uk putting ‘digital insights’ in the email subject line.