Foreword from Gordon McKenzie
CEO of GuildHE

As Chief Executive of GuildHE, the representative body for smaller and specialist higher education (HE) institutions, I am delighted to share with you the findings from Jisc’s 2021 digital experience insights survey of HE teaching staff. From exploring access to technology and devices, to how organisations are supporting their staff’s professional development in digital skills, the report identifies the barriers that must be removed if we are truly to unlock innovation in teaching and learning.

This year almost 4,000 teaching staff from 24 universities across the UK shared their experiences of using technology to support their teaching. Views were gathered between October 2020 and July 2021 when the majority of teaching was delivered solely online during the national lockdown. The results, therefore, provide valuable insights into those digital methods that really worked, and those challenges that need addressing if the tertiary education sector is to move successfully to a model that combines both face-to-face and online learning.

I am encouraged that staff are keen to embrace the opportunities digital technology provides in enhancing the student experience. Teaching staff across HE moved mountains to ensure a high standard of learning was delivered in exceptional circumstances. This is reflected in 84% of teaching staff rating the quality of the online digital learning that their courses provided as ‘best imaginable’, ‘excellent’ or ‘good’. For some, the sudden move to online teaching presented welcome opportunities to rethink more traditional approaches and open new channels of communication with students.

But determining the right blend for both staff and students is an art that requires support, encouragement, and collaboration across institutions. While it is positive that 66% of teachers were offered support and 54% rated the support they were given as ‘best imaginable’, ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ it still suggests a sizeable portion of the teaching workforce did not receive the support needed to deliver a high-quality learning experience online.

It is unsurprising there were technical and access issues. 64% of teaching staff encountered one or more problems when teaching online and almost a fifth experienced three or more. Typical problems included not having good wifi connectivity, not having access to a suitable computer device or a safe and private place to work. The correlation here with the barriers reported by learners in Jisc’s 2021 HE student digital experience insights survey (https://jisc.dei-student-survey-he) shows that the digital divide is not a problem solely impacting students. This is a major obstacle in the quest to deliver the excellent teaching and learning experience that our students deserve and expect, and solutions to this problem must involve collaborative efforts from Government, organisations such as Jisc, and HE institutions.

Creating an environment that allows time for staff to collaborate, be creative, and develop their collective digital skill set must continue to be a priority for HE institutions and Government alike. To achieve Government ambitions set out in the Lifetime Skills Guarantee, we all need to invest continuously in the digital capabilities of staff so they can in turn invest in our students, ensuring everyone can train, retrain, or upskill throughout their lives.

I strongly encourage the senior leadership teams of HE institutions to embrace the findings presented in this survey and continue to work with Jisc to support digital advancements. All students across every region of the country deserve a high-quality education, whether delivered face-to-face or online and these results demonstrate the importance of the continued investment in the digital capabilities and confidence of teaching staff.

NB: survey responses may not add up to 100% due to rounding or questions where teaching staff had the option to select more than one response.

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Key statistics

The survey was conducted between October 2020 and July 2021 and there were 3,729 responses from 24 universities and one college delivering higher education. 18 of these organisations were based in England, three in Wales, three in Northern Ireland and one in Scotland.

The 25 participating organisations represents 9% of all higher education providers in the UK. The highest response rate from a single HE organisation was 406 teaching staff (17% of their total teaching staff population) and the overall average response rate was 149 responses per organisation. On average, around 19% of the total teaching staff population in each organisation responded. Six of the 25 organisations contributed fewer than 50 responses.

The 2020/21 digital experience insights surveys focused on online teaching, learning and working. In this survey, we asked teaching staff to respond to the questions based on their experiences in the two weeks immediately prior to taking part.

Gender of teaching staff participants

56% female
43% male
2% other

There were differences in satisfaction ratings between genders with female teaching staff more likely to give higher positive response ratings than all other colleagues.

How many years had staff worked in their organisation in a teaching role?

8% less than a year
21% one to three years
28% four to nine years
43% ten years or more

Staff who had taught at their organisation for less than a year rated the support they had received to teach online more highly than those who had been in their role for over a year. Conversely, staff who had taught in their organisation the longest were most likely to have agreed that online teaching had created technical challenges, changed their role as a teacher and added significant stress to their workload.

Executive summary

Learning from an enforced move to mass online learning

Teaching staff, and the teams and systems that support them, came under intense pressure with the enforced move to online learning during the coronavirus pandemic. Hopes that teaching and learning would begin to move back on campus at the start of the 2020/21 academic year were not possible. Instead, teachers had to rapidly scale up online learning.

Online learning is not a new concept – many universities and colleges have been researching, developing and supporting new practices for decades. It was the scale and pace of the shift that was different and the fact that all teaching staff needed to embrace it, regardless of previous experience. As the primary mode of delivery, online learning presented new opportunities and alternative approaches although some found it daunting. Having to learn how to facilitate learning, teaching and assessment in an online environment meant upskilling for some. This, combined with the need to troubleshoot their own technical problems as well as those of their students, while continuing to deliver high class teaching, was challenging and pushed some staff outside of their comfort zones.

As students experienced more online learning they were able to identify what helped them to study and progress, and what was less helpful. So what can we learn from recent experience as we design future blends of learning that combine on site and online experiences? Successful online teaching is complex and multi-faceted and some clear prerequisites are emerging.

Infrastructure and access to the right technology

82% of teaching took place wholly online, most of it delivered by staff working from home. So when staff encountered problems it was difficult. 64% of teaching staff experienced at least one problem and almost a fifth experienced three or more. Not all teaching staff were able to access the online systems and services they needed. Teachers also expressed concerns about the barriers students faced and how disruptive this could be for session delivery. Successful online teaching and learning requires:

- Easy and reliable access to platforms that facilitate communication in a well-structured and consistent way
- Assessment software and mechanisms that are integrated with other systems, encourage variety of practice, and are capable of accommodating specific subject needs and large volumes of traffic
- Clearly signposted and readily available technical support when problems occur – particularly during delivery of teaching and when assessments are taking place

- Good, reliable and affordable wifi
- Devices of a sufficiently high specification equipped with both general and subject specific equipment, software and apps
Support to teach and assess online

Teaching online requires a level of digital confidence over and above personal use of technology. 60% of students turn to their lecturers or tutors for help with online learning. So teachers need to be able to confidently guide and support students with their digital skills development, signpost specialist and self-help options and sometimes troubleshoot (particularly if an issue occurs during a taught session). This need for duality in skill and confidence is sometimes overlooked and can be a cause of significant stress for teachers if not acknowledged and addressed.

While just over half of teaching staff that took part in the survey agreed that they had received support for teaching online, not all felt they had received appropriate guidance, support or time to explore new practices. Teaching staff need support to:

- Assess their existing digital skills levels and, with support, develop digital capabilities appropriate to their role, subject specialisms and interests
- Design engaging and interactive activities, modules, curricula and assessments specifically for online delivery
- Develop collaborative learning approaches that emulate workplace practices and tend to be more engaging and transformative for students
- Explore different delivery and assessment models, different tools, software and applications
- Take an active role in working with learning technologists to design effective and well-structured online learning
- Operate within a supportive network of peers, both discipline specific and more broadly so that they can share and learn from a wide range of effective practices, experience opportunities to co-design and develop transferable skills

- Access and use a range of high quality resources to support teaching with clear understanding of digital copyright and licensing protocols. For example, library collections, free and subscription sets such as Jisc collections (https://www.jisc.ac.uk/jisc-collections), Google, YouTube, Microsoft, LinkedIn Learning, open educational resources (OERs) and peer created resources

Actively engage with teachers as partners

Teachers play a vital role in designing and delivering learning experiences and yet so few feel they have an opportunity to be involved in decisions about online learning. Ensuring they are able to play an active role in the student-staff-organisation partnership will benefit all.

Wellbeing

High numbers of teaching staff felt that the move to online teaching added significant stress to their workload and had changed their role as a teacher. Redesigning curricula and assessment practices takes time to do well. Many also experienced technical challenges. For some, this meant they felt less proficient and less professional.

Spending so much time online also had an impact on physical wellbeing with teaching staff reporting problems with eyesight, posture and more sedentary working practices. Isolation, loneliness and anxiety were also cited as issues and several mentioned not having access to the same peer support mechanisms as when on campus.

Care and concerns for the impact of the change on students was also stressful. Teachers would like to see the same attention given to their wellbeing as that afforded to students and suggested dedicated support lines as one option.

Support from Jisc

Digital at the core: a 2030 strategy framework for university leaders

Jisc, Universities UK and Emerge Education have worked with technical partner Salesforce to develop a long-term digital strategy framework (https://jisc.ac.uk/ltr-strategy-report) for university leaders.

Technology-enabled teaching and learning at scale

From fixes to foresight, Jisc and Emerge Education provide insights for universities and start ups (https://jisc.ac.uk/technology-enabled-teaching).

Rethinking assessment

Has the pandemic helped to move us to an assessment system that is more relevant, adaptable and trustworthy? Read our rethinking assessment report (https://jisc.ac.uk/rethinking-assessment).

Membership services

Building digital capabilities (digitalcapability.jisc.ac.uk) helps organisations to support staff to develop their digital skills and practice and includes our innovative discovery tool.

Digital experience insights (digitalinsights.jisc.ac.uk) will help you to gather and analyse your own data from your students, teaching staff, professional services teams and researchers.

Guides and resources

Digital pedagogy toolkit (https://jisc.ac.uk/digital-pedagogy-toolkit) helps academics to make informed choices when embedding digital into the curriculum.

Our online learning benchmarking toolkit for higher education (https://jisc.ac.uk/briefings-and-toolkits) will help you to map and develop your approach to online learning.

Our poster on the student digital journey (https://jisc.ac.uk/student-digital-journey) suggests ways in which you can promote support and development in digital skills development throughout all stages of learning - from pre-enrolment to successful completion.

Digital wellbeing briefings (https://jisc.ac.uk/digital-wellbeing) for senior managers and practitioners: these briefings explore key issues and responsibilities and set out good practice principles.

Online safety (https://jisc.ac.uk/online-safety) keep your organisation’s staff and students working safely online, whether they’re on or off-campus.
Theme one: you and your current teaching situation

In theme one we aimed to establish how and where staff were teaching and whether they had experienced any problems.

**Mode of teaching** (could select one option)
- 2% physically on site
- 16% a mix of physically on site and online teaching
- 82% online teaching (on your own/with other in your department)

The majority of teaching staff were teaching mainly online. A relatively small number were teaching using a combination of online and on site; very few were teaching physically on site.

**Where were teachers doing their online teaching?** (could tick all that applied)
- 94% at home
- 13% on campus in your office, work spaces, libraries etc
- 0% off campus in public spaces (eg cafes)
- 2% I have not been teaching online

Most teaching staff were working from home although a few did use on campus facilities for their online teaching.

**Online class sizes** (could tick all that applied)
- 19% just you (eg one-to-one tutorial)
- 21% 2-6 students
- 38% 7-16 students
- 51% 17-50 students
- 20% 51-100 students
- 17% Over 100 students

Over half of teaching staff had delivered online teaching to groups of 17-50 students, in fact the distribution across all categories indicates a variety of different class sizes in operation.

**Use of assistive technologies** (could tick all that applied)
- 7% dictation (speech to text)
- 4% screen magnification
- 2% screen readers (text to speech)
- 1% alternative input devices (eg switches)
- 87% none of these

8% of all teaching staff said that they used at least one of four assistive technologies and only 19% of those who said they used them were offered support to do so. 3% used two or more types of the technologies listed.

**Problems encountered when teaching online** (yes/no responses)
- 51% poor wifi connection
- 25% access to online platforms/services
- 20% need specialist software
- 16% no suitable computer/device
- 16% no safe, private area to work
- 12% mobile data costs

Overall, approximately 64% of teaching staff encountered one or more of the problems we specifically asked them about. Over half of teaching staff said they had problems with poor wifi connections, a quarter experienced problems accessing online platforms and/or services and a fifth felt they needed access to specialist software.

Access to specialist equipment was a problem for some subjects. Seemingly small issues such as not having access to smartphones became a barrier when two-factor authentication was required to allow access to platforms and systems. Teachers found that having additional monitors, headsets and microphones was helpful.

While the numbers of teaching staff who said they had no suitable computer/device or a safe, private area to work were lower, this is still a substantial number. Perhaps more than might have been expected also experienced problems with mobile data costs.

Further analysis revealed a, not unexpected, reduction in satisfaction in other aspects of their digital experience (eg lower ratings for the quality of their online learning environment, or support).

Teaching staff quote:
“I don’t have designated workspace at home, nor suitable furniture or lighting.”
Theme two: digital platforms and services at your organisation

In theme two we looked at how well teaching staff felt their organisation supported them with the technology they needed to teach online – the teaching environment, the digital platforms, systems and services. Also important is how effectively the organisation communicated with them, facilitated collaboration online and to what extent organisations involved teaching staff in decision-making about online teaching.

Involving teaching staff in decisions about online teaching

- 25% of teaching staff agreed that they were given the chance to be involved in decisions about online teaching (36% neutral, 39% disagreed)

Only a quarter of teaching staff agreed that they had the chance to be involved in decisions about online teaching and far more respondents gave neutral responses or disagreed.

Organisational systems, services and support

The percentages of teaching staff who agreed with statements about organisational systems, services and support were:

- 66% enabled to access online systems and services from anywhere (25% neutral, 9% disagreed)
- 61% communicated effectively online eg email, messaging, notifications (28% neutral, 11% disagreed)
- 45% provided a good online environment for collaboration (39% neutral, 17% disagreed)
- 43% supported to use own digital devices (38% neutral, 19% disagreed)

While approximately two thirds of teaching staff agreed they were able to access online systems and services from anywhere and that their organisation communicated effectively online, less than half felt the online environment supported collaboration or that they were supported to use their own digital devices.

The teaching environment

The percentages of staff who agreed with statements about their teaching environments were:

- 59% safe and secure (36% neutral, 5% disagreed)
- 57% reliable (30% neutral, 13% disagreed)
- 41% easy to navigate (39% neutral, 20% disagreed)
- 39% well designed (42% neutral, 19% disagreed)

These responses were less positive than is desired and high numbers of teaching staff gave ambivalent responses or disagreed, indicating room for improvement. The range of systems and platforms available in some organisations means that not all staff are clear about what we mean by the term ‘teaching/learning environment’.

Teaching staff quote:
“Online learning allows students to connect from anywhere in the world and is inclusive to students with disabilities.”
Theme three: technology in your teaching

Theme three explored how technology had been used in teaching, the range of teaching activities, the overall quality of online and digital learning and the impact of teaching online on teachers’ roles.

Overall quality of online and digital learning (could select one option)

Teaching staff were asked to rate the quality of online and digital learning that their courses provided to students. Overall, their responses were very positive — 84% of them rated it as ‘best imaginable’, ‘excellent’ or ‘good’. 4% ‘poor’, ‘awful’ or ‘worst imaginable’.

- 3% best imaginable
- 28% excellent
- 53% good
- 13% average
- 3% poor
- 1% awful
- 0% worst imaginable

Range of teaching activities (could tick all that applied)

The percentages of teaching staff who said they had carried out the following online teaching activities in the last two weeks prior to taking part in the survey were:

- 83% live lecture/teaching session
- 79% fed back to students on their work (need not be formal/summative)
- 71% produced and uploaded course materials eg quizzes, assignments
- 70% marked/graded coursework
- 65% recorded a lecture/teaching session
- 59% held online drop in session(s)
- 53% supported students to learn online
- 40% found and shared course materials made by others
- 35% moderated an online discussion
- 29% supported a group project
- 15% virtual lab, practical or field work
- 13% average

High percentages of teaching staff had carried out live lectures/teaching sessions and fed back to students on their work. The number of teaching staff who produced and uploaded course materials, marked/graded coursework and recorded lectures/teaching sessions is also positive. Fewer numbers of teaching staff engaged in activities that were more collaborative, engaging or were likely to generate peer-to-peer interaction of the type typically found in the workplace.

Impact of online teaching on role

The percentages of staff who agreed with statements about the impact of online teaching on their role were:

- 82% created technical challenges (13% neutral, 5% disagreed)
- 76% changed your role as a teacher (16% neutral, 8% disagreed)
- 73% added significant new stress to your workload (17% neutral, 10% disagreed)

High numbers of teaching staff agreed that online teaching had an impact on their role as a teacher, had created technical challenges and added significant stress to their workload. This will clearly have an impact on their wellbeing and is a major concern.

Teaching staff quote:

“Not only do I have to consider the delivery of the lesson, but I also have to consider and deal with the technical challenges that students face (e.g., logging in, accessing content, no access to hardware).”
Theme four: your digital development

How well supported did teachers feel in getting to grips with online teaching? Theme four looked at the guidance and opportunities teachers were offered to develop their digital skills and whether they felt these were enough to help them achieve the expectations placed upon them.

Overall support for online teaching (could select one option)
54% of teaching staff rated the support they received for online teaching as either ‘best imaginable’, ‘excellent’ or ‘good’, 29% rated it as ‘average’, and 17% rated it as ‘poor’, ‘awful’ or ‘worst imaginable’.

- 2% best imaginable
- 14% excellent
- 38% good
- 29% average

Further analysis showed that teaching staff who were positive about the support they received to teach online were also likely to rate the quality of online and digital teaching on their course as above average.

Confidence in aspects of online teaching
The percentages of teaching staff who agreed with questions set specifically in the context of the current pandemic situation were:

- 44% teaching online made you feel safe (42% neutral, 14% disagreed)
- 40% could access all the organisational support services they needed online (36% neutral, 24% disagreed)
- 26% the teaching expectations placed on them had been reasonable (28% neutral, 46% disagreed)
- 16% the concerns of teaching staff and their representatives were being heard (38% neutral, 46% disagreed)

Less than half of teaching staff agreed that they could access all the organisational support services they needed online and high numbers disagreed that the teaching expectations placed upon them had been reasonable. High numbers also disagreed that their concerns were being heard.

Where do teachers go for help with online teaching? (could tick all that applied)
- 78% teaching colleagues
- 69% online videos and resources
- 63% IT/e-learning staff
- 21% friends and family
- 6% library staff
- 4% don’t need help

Teaching staff were most likely to seek support from their teaching colleagues, online videos and resources and IT/e-learning staff. Very few felt that they didn’t need any help at all.

Support and guidance
The percentages of teaching staff who agreed they had received support for online and digital skills development were:

- 57% support for teaching online/away from campus (29% neutral, 15% disagreed)
- 44% guidance about the digital skills needed in your teaching role (35% neutral, 21% disagreed)
- 17% time to explore new digital tools and approaches (28% neutral, 55% disagreed)
- 15% an assessment of their digital skills and training needs (38% neutral, 47% disagreed)
- 6% reward and recognition for the digital skills you develop (27% neutral, 67% disagreed)

Less than half of teaching staff agreed they had received guidance about the digital skills needed in their role and very few agreed they had an assessment of their digital skills and training needs, high numbers disagreed. High numbers also disagreed that they had time to explore new digital skills and approaches.

Developing the digital skills of teaching staff
The percentages of teaching staff who said they were offered support or training to develop digital capabilities were (could tick all that applied):

- 66% teaching online
- 46% creating digital learning materials
- 35% innovations in digital teaching and learning
- 28% keeping student data safe under GDPR
- 27% equality and accessibility legislation
- 24% delivering effective digital assessments
- 22% basic IT skills
- 18% behaving safely and respectfully online
- 17% specialist software for teaching your subject area
- 14% digital copyright and licensing
- 12% protecting your privacy in online spaces

With the exception of support for teaching online, the responses were low. Less than a quarter said they were offered support or training to deliver effective digital assessments, something identified as a need from analysis of free text responses.

Few staff reported having been offered support for aspects such as basic IT skills, GDPR, accessibility, copyright and privacy, although our analysis showed a positive correlation between those who had received digital copyright and licensing training and those who sought and shared materials created by others.

Teaching staff quote: “Increase the speed of support so that we can rectify issues quickly and provide more workshops.”
Hearing what teaching staff had to say

Teaching staff were asked to say what they thought the most positive and negative aspects of online teaching were, how they felt the quality of online and digital learning could be improved for students and what one thing they felt their universities should do to help them teach effectively online. Their responses reveal that teaching preferences are individual – what some teaching staff really like, others do not.

The most positive aspects of online teaching

There were 3,129 free text responses to this question.

Teaching staff liked:

**New and flexible ways of teaching**
- The move to a new way of teaching and assessing learning was exciting and presented opportunities to reflect on, and reassess curriculum design, learn new skills, develop pedagogic practices and master new technologies.
- Being able to record live sessions and develop flexible resource banks was noted as a benefit that also had a positive impact on student engagement (revisiting lectures, going at own pace, fitting learning around other commitments).
- Staff were able to use pre-recorded lectures to devise more structured learning using virtual learning environments (VLEs).
- Having experienced increased student engagement online, teaching staff who had previously been reluctant to engage in online teaching were encouraged to upskill.

**Improved student access to learning**
- Students had much more flexibility in their choices of how and when to access learning.
- Some students took advantage of the opportunities presented by online learning to supplement formal sessions with self-led learning.

**Increased engagement and interaction**
- Some found that attendance and engagement in online lectures and tutorials improved or was better than expected.
- The options to reach out and support students using online platforms and chat was an effective way of encouraging contributions in classes, getting feedback from students and in making participation easier for students of all abilities.
- Students who would not usually contribute in face-to-face groups were able to do so in ways they preferred or found easier.
- Online learning also helped to maintain relationships beyond classes.
- Using interactive educational games and quizzes helped enhance formative assessment and gave students immediate feedback.

**Convenience and improved productivity**
- Reduced travel times when working from home saved staff both time and money and allowed them to spend more of their day planning and teaching.
- Improved autonomy, lack of distractions when working and feeling safe at home were also noted as positive aspects of teaching online.

**Teaching staff quote:**

“It has allowed us to challenge the pedagogy underpinning our previous approaches and adapt both for digital delivery, and also when physically present.”

Teaching staff quote:

“Loneliness has affected my mental health at times.”
The most negative aspects of online teaching

There were 3,379 free text responses to this question. Teaching staff disliked:

Reduced student interaction and engagement
- While understanding the reasons why students may not wish to have their cameras on when learning online, staff found it harder to interact and engage with students when they couldn’t see their faces. They found it difficult to get to know students, judge when support was needed, gauge body language and concentration levels.
- Managing group work – can be chaotic with large groups, divergent conversations/chat. Platform limitations also had an impact.
- Some students only engaged with work for assessment and not broader learning activities. This made it difficult to assess student understanding until it was too late.

The impact of online learning on students
- Watching students struggle with the lack of social engagement, the challenges of digital poverty and mental health and wellbeing had a negative effect on staff wellbeing.
- Some students found it hard to make themselves heard in online environments.

Technical and access issues
- Difficulties accessing the software and technology required to make online learning effective.
- Poor wifi and internet connectivity.
- Having to purchase equipment, software/apps and licences required at own expense.
- Lack of adequate/easy to use software to support assessment.
- Struggling to work with multiple online environments/platforms.
- Feeling ‘thrown in at the deep end’ with little or no support.

Increased workload
- Preparing material for online lectures and new formats (including accessibility requirements).
- Assessment tasks taking longer to prepare and mark online.
- Resolving technical issues (own and students).
- Supporting students with technical issues in addition to teaching and providing subject, learning and pastoral support.
- The need to double-up staffing in some instances to address concerns about technical issues and management of sessions.
- Supporting split-class delivery models (some online, some in person).

Teaching staff quote:
“Student lack of knowledge of the use of digital technologies and their general issues with mental wellbeing have hugely escalated the number of queries and requests for help I have had to deal with. This has increased my workload.”

Declining mental and physical wellbeing
- Too much sedentary screen time has been stressful and detrimental to physical and mental health.
- Staring at blank screens was demoralising.
- Not having suitable home working space (including lighting, privacy).
- Lack of access to appropriate equipment.
- Loneliness and reduced access to colleagues and professional or personal support systems.
- Absorbing and supporting the stress of students.
- Not feeling confident or professional when working online.

Teaching staff quote:
“Listen to staff and support them – it appears you have focused solely on the student voice.”
Improving the quality of online and digital teaching

Teaching staff were asked what one thing their organisation should do to improve the quality of online and digital teaching (3,033 free text responses) and what one thing their organisation should do to help them to teach effectively online (2,615 free text responses). Teaching staff would like universities to:

- Recognise the challenges in moving so swiftly to online teaching
  The move to online teaching raised significant issues that have made it difficult for some to continue to deliver effective teaching. Perceptions were that these challenges were not always overtly recognised by senior management. Issues included:
  - Increased workload and pressure to adapt quickly without sufficient time to fully explore and develop new practices
  - Lack of pre-emptive training in new platforms
  - Unsuitable/too low a specification of hardware and software provided

Address digital poverty and improve infrastructure
- Address digital poverty for students and staff by investing in, and providing access to, high quality devices, licences, software and connectivity
- Provide staff with equipment that meets the specification required for their roles and the digital expectations placed upon them. Some staff experienced hardware failures and had to use their own equipment and software, some had requests for specific technologies refused
- Ensure that students know what equipment they need and the specification required for their course. They also need to know about equipment loan schemes
- Consider allowing staff with technical/equipment/access difficulties back on campus to facilitate their teaching

Improve existing platforms and information management
- Staff found that there was either a proliferation of platforms that lead to disparate, hard to manage information spread across systems and lack of consistency in approach, or that there was perhaps just one platform with inadequate functionality/capability

Encourage online collaboration
- Teaching staff were looking for support to make online collaboration and knowledge sharing between peers more user friendly – the perceived benefits/limitations of online platforms was a notable topic of discussion here
- Ensure virtual learning environments are reliable, fit for purpose and support collaborative learning. They should have user-friendly interfaces and offer all standard features
- Create an easily accessible library of documentation – a source of tips and answers but also to provide/reinforce a consistent approach

Facilitate student interaction and engagement
- Suggestions for improving student interaction and engagement included making it mandatory for cameras to be on during sessions (although other issues make this an inappropriate request), making the online learning platform more attractive, use of quizzes and reducing the length of online sessions

Teaching staff quote:
"Allow time to develop content. It takes a huge amount of time to develop good online material and many staff are keen to do this because they can see the benefits, but time restricts these activities. Could we employ an IT savvy person to curate the material of the school? Academics, on the whole, don’t make good graphics designers/video producers although I will now be claiming this on my CV."

Provide more training, support and guidance
- Recognise that staff are having to upskill aspects of their profession at pace
- Staff require high quality, timely training to address the technical aspects in use of technology, platforms and software as well as the pedagogical aspects of designing and assessing effective and engaging online experiences
- Support differentiation – the needs of different subjects and individuals – a ‘one size fits all’ approach is not appropriate
- Provide clear guidance on who has responsibility for dealing with technical support issues – consider allocating dedicated departmental technicians

Teaching staff quote:
"Acknowledge that this is a different pedagogy completely. Help staff to let go and give them the tools to do this."

Recognise and support staff wellbeing
- Staff would appreciate more general help and support. The combined impact of COVID-19 and the need to provide more support for students and alleviate their anxieties along with working from home, increasing workloads and isolation have all taken a toll
- Acknowledge the increased workload in learning new technologies, software and the time needed to prepare and develop online teaching and support materials

Manage expectations
- Communicate clearly to manage student expectations about their learning experience and mitigate impact through honest discussions
- Feedback from students should be routine and is an important aspect of learning and improving for all

Learn from the past and look to the future
- Use lessons learned from the COVID-19 experience to develop mixed delivery modes in the future
- While some felt that returning to on-campus learning was the best solution, others felt that a partial return and a mix of online/on site learning had some value
Get involved

See the digital experience through the eyes of your students and staff

Our 2021/22 digital experience insights surveys are now open. If you would like to find out more about the digital experience of your students, teaching staff, professional services staff and researchers, please contact us at help@jisc.ac.uk putting ‘digital insights’ in the email subject line.

Find out more at digitalinsights.jisc.ac.uk

Supporting you

Higher education strategy 2021-2024: powering UK higher education

See how our HE strategy for 2021-2024 (https://jisc.ac.uk/he-strategy) will support universities towards a technology-empowered future.

Learning and teaching reimagined

Working with you to help plot your organisation’s path to the future of higher education.

- Read the report (https://jisc.ac.uk/lttr-a-new-dawn), learning and teaching reimagined: a new dawn for higher education.
- Explore the research, visions of the future, examples of emerging good practice and tools to get you started

Let’s work together to transform your digital experience

Contact your account manager (https://jisc.ac.uk/contact/your-account-manager)

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