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All the quotes in this report are taken from comments made by teaching staff in their survey responses.

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Digital skills and teacher professional development are an essential investment to stay ahead of the curve.

This digital experience insights survey provides a fascinating insight into a sector moving towards a more sophisticated digital learning and teaching experience. Presented in a clear and easy to digest format, the report highlights areas of success and suggests targets for development for the higher education (HE) sector around digital skills and practice, equipment and connectivity. This survey is important as a record of teacher beliefs and attitudes in HE and as a companion piece to the digital experience insights student survey 2022, which was released in September.

More than 3,500 teaching staff from 30 universities participated, sharing how they use technology to support their teaching. The results were collected between November 2021 and July 2022, the first academic year not disturbed by lockdowns since 2019/20. These figures reveal a sector in transition, moving from one reality to another, forever changed by the experiences of both teachers and students since March 2020.

As institutions face the challenge of creating curricula which respond to the expectations of the pandemic generation, it will be more important than ever to ensure both staff and students are invested in to enable them to optimise what “digital” has to offer. The quote “no curriculum development without staff development” has a particular resonance here.

Today’s students expect choice and flexibility in their study – Jisc’s recent HE student digital experience insights survey found that more students preferred a blended learning approach to mainly face-to-face for the first time. Students now have a clear understanding of the power of digital tools and platforms and expect to see them used in ways which reflect their learning needs. This is a challenge for higher education institutions (HEIs) to reflect on and address. What was once seen as acceptable is no longer.

The recent review of blended learning by the Office for Students (OfS) recommended that educational organisations invest in digital training support for staff and students. Less than half (48%) of respondents to the digital experience survey rated their digital support as ‘above average’, down from 54% last year. In addition, only 6% of teaching staff reported being rewarded or recognised for their digital skills. The continuing digital transformation in the sector means now is the time to invest in digital support.

The OfS review also recommends using pedagogical needs to dictate the use of digital elements in curricula. Pairing the right technology tools and staff development and reward practices with student needs and curriculum design will result in a better student experience.

At this moment, when expectations are rightly high and digital transformation is touching every part of modern life, it is both critical and timely that HEIs support their educators, review their teaching and learning strategies and consider the extent to which the level of digital competence needed is reflected in staff and student development and support. They also need to ensure the right equipment is available to individual teaching staff and consider how reward and recognition strategies reflect the pressing demand to ‘up our game’ in the digital teaching and learning space.
Key statistics

The HE teaching staff survey was conducted between November 2021 and July 2022 and there were 3,533 participants from 30 different organisations delivering higher education (28 universities and two colleges). This represents 10% of all universities and HE institutions in the UK. Nineteen of these were based in England, five in Wales, four in Scotland and two in Northern Ireland.

The highest number of responses from a single HE organisation was 247 teaching staff (19% of its total teaching staff population) and the overall average response rate was 118 responses per organisation (on average, around 13% of the total number of teaching staff in each organisation that participated).

Survey responses may not add up to 100% due to rounding or questions where staff had the option to select more than one response. Where we have presented a percentage agree score, it has been calculated based on the positive responses only, without including those that were neutral.

There are occasions in this report when we have compared the responses of teaching staff with those of students from our 2022 digital experience insights survey for students. You can view the HE student findings online at https://bit.ly/DEI-HE-students-2022.

Gender of participants

- 54% Female
- 45% Male
- 1% Other (eg non binary)

Ethnicity of participants

- 2% Black, African, Caribbean or Black British
- 3% Mixed ethnicity
- 3% Other ethnic group
- 6% Asian or Asian British
- 85% White

Length of time staff had worked at their organisation in a teaching role

- 10% Less than a year
- 18% 1 to 3 years
- 30% 4 to 9 years
- 43% 10 years or more

Staff who identified as being disabled or having an additional support requirement

- 90% No
- 10% Yes

Subject area of courses taught

- 14% Arts, humanities and languages
- 4% Design and creative arts including media
- 21% Health sciences: associated with medicine
- 18% Maths, physics, engineering and technology
- 7% Natural sciences
- 18% Professional: law, business, education etc
- 14% Social sciences
- 4% Other
Executive summary

Teaching staff are fundamental to an excellent learning experience

A good learning experience begins with effective pedagogic design. It calls for skill in delivering and supporting learning while accommodating individual student needs. It’s a bit like conducting an orchestra – all aspects need to be in tune and in time and, if any one element is out of place, the planned experience won’t be as effective.

Many staff have these skills but teaching online also requires them to be able to draw confidently on a bedrock of complex digital ecosystems to realise the full benefits of using technology in education. This is much more demanding than may first appear, involving multiple skills sets and people as well as holistic planning, design and support.

Technology can provide efficiencies as well as opportunities to offer students more engaging experiences but using it at scale to fulfil the digital promise to a consistently high standard is not easy. It depends on a smooth-flowing and integrated combination of elements: pedagogy, digital skill and confidence, robust and reliable access to fully interoperable systems, software, tools and apps – and readily available technical support for when things don’t work as planned. Each of these underlying components has its own complexities. Any misalignment or malfunction can present significant barriers to overcome, resulting in loss of confidence for staff.

This year’s teaching staff report for higher education shares the successes and some of the things staff say are impeding progress in teaching with digital technology. It highlights the need for fresh thinking and continued collaboration with all stakeholders as universities work to empower academics to deliver the first-class learning experience that students expect.

Above average satisfaction ratings but potential to improve

64% of teaching staff rated the overall quality of the online teaching environment as above average (best imaginable, excellent or good), 26% rated it as average, which leaves just 11% rating it as below average (poor, awful or worst imaginable). This is a good starting point but more is achievable.

Equitable access to technology – getting the basics right

The majority of teaching staff had access to laptops (88%) and/or desktop computers (64%). Around half had access to additional screens, microphones or headsets and 38% also had access to cameras or webcams. These additional devices make a considerable difference to the quality of online teaching and resource production as well as to staff health and safety. They are sometimes regarded as 'nice to have' but are much more important. A well-equipped member of staff will be able to deliver high-quality learning more easily and in a way that doesn’t compromise their wellbeing. Smartphones (26%) and tablets (21%) were less well used. 16% of teaching staff cited not having a suitable computer/device as a barrier to teaching online and 14% said they had no safe, private area to work.

Support to loan or buy

71% of teaching staff said that they had been given devices or had received support to loan or buy the digital devices used in their teaching practices but nearly a third did not. There were many comments in the free text data from respondents who said they had to buy their own equipment and software, either because they didn’t have access to it through their organisation or because it was not of a sufficiently high specification, was old and slow or inadequate for their use. Part-time staff appear to be more disadvantaged. Cyber security concerns mean that it is inadvisable for staff to use their own devices in work-related activities.
Executive summary... continued

Technical difficulties and access to systems and platforms

With 89% of teaching staff conducting at least some of their teaching from home, any difficulties with access are likely to impede effective delivery. More than half of survey respondents said that they had experienced problems when teaching online and 42% cited poor wifi connection. Only 55% of teaching staff said they were supported to access online platforms and services off site, and just 35% agreed they were supported to use their own devices. While this may have been partially affected by concerns over cyber security threats or network capacity, if teaching staff don’t have devices provided by their organisation and are having to rely on using their own but are unable to access the systems and platforms then they are doubly disadvantaged.

37% of respondents to the survey said that, subject to funding being available, their preference would be to upgrade platforms and systems, ranking this as more important than IT support, or provision of more computers and devices or specialist software.

Making use of assistive features

Many tools, apps and software have assistive features built in as these are recognised as having value for all users, not just those with specific needs. Features like transcripts, captions, spelling or writing support, dictation, screen readers, screen magnification and ergonomic devices can make a big difference to a user’s experience. Yet almost half of teaching staff (49%) said they didn’t use any of these features and only 32% said they had received support to do so. This is potentially a missed opportunity; not just for staff, but also for students who traditionally rely on their teachers and lecturers for support in using technology. Investment in staff awareness and capability in use of these features will benefit many students, support accessibility compliance and contribute to building an inclusive culture.

Technology in teaching

Staff had access to a range of systems, platforms and applications to support their teaching practices. 91% had access to a virtual learning environment and 87% had access to live video classes. Just over half (54%) had access to online assessment or testing platforms that, when well-deployed, can be effective in managing assessment processes for both staff and students. Only 35% had access to dashboards for tracking student progress, which extend student support and progression.

The ability to collaborate effectively is a highly sought-after skill in the workplace and wider society. Being able to do so competently online has become an essential employability skill. Yet only 40% of teaching staff said they had access to collaborative applications. This was also reflected in the range of teaching activities reported, with only 23% of teaching staff saying they had supported online collaboration in the two weeks prior to taking part in the survey. Responses to the more naturally collaborative activities, such as text-based discussions (9%), lab, practical or fieldwork (8%) and use of virtual reality (1%) were also considerably lower.

Support for digital development

Staff did not perceive themselves to be well supported in terms of their digital development. Only 48% rated the overall support for effective online teaching as above average (best imaginable, excellent or good). 44% agreed they were provided with guidance about the digital skills needed in their teaching role and just 14% said they were provided with an assessment of their digital skills and training needs. Those who said they had received support on a varied range of training and support options amounted to 50% or less of respondents. This is surprising given that some of the items listed relate to mandatory aspects like accessibility, GDPR, copyright and licensing. It may be that other factors are at play; staff may not know how to access the training and some cited issues such as time and lack of recognition or reward as barriers.
Moving forward together

While 66% of teaching staff agreed that online teaching was convenient for them, less than a third agreed that it allowed them to teach in the ways that they preferred (31%), to assess learners fairly (32%), or that it enabled students to make good progress (30%).

Within the survey there were three free-text questions that invited respondents to comment on the positive and negative aspects of their digital experience and tell us about what ‘one thing’ would make a difference. When providing feedback on these questions it is common for teaching staff to focus first on the experiences of their students before commenting on their own.

Teaching staff appreciate the convenience and flexibility of technology, the ability to provide support in different ways and to make more content available in a variety of formats. Some say it enables them to interact more with their students, others disagree and feel it impacts negatively on social connections and a sense of community. Technical issues and a lack of support were another concern. When working in a public environment, teaching staff are very exposed and may experience considerable stress or fear a risk to their reputation if things don’t work as anticipated.

Many of the suggestions from teaching staff about how to improve their own (and their students’) digital experiences related to staff training and support. They cited a wide range of options, formats and approaches.

The data shared here, and that unique to individual participating organisations, provides a valuable insight into the experiences of teaching staff. When combined with the experiences and expertise of all involved in teaching and learning in higher education – students, learning technologists and designers, technicians, e-learning personnel, learning enhancement teams, and others – it can be used to inform and shape a stronger and more satisfying digital experience for everyone as we look to the future.
Theme one: you and your technology

In theme one we establish which devices and technologies teaching staff used for their teaching and whether they had any additional support requirements.

Devices regularly used for teaching (could tick all that applied)
- 88% laptop
- 64% desktop computer
- 49% additional screen
- 43% additional microphone or headset
- 38% additional camera or webcam
- 26% smartphone
- 21% tablet
- 1% none of these

The vast majority of HE teaching staff regularly used a laptop in their teaching and a substantial number also used a desktop computer.

Only just over a quarter used a smartphone, and less than that used a tablet. 1% of teaching staff said they did not use any of these devices.

Support to loan or buy devices (based on responses of those who selected at least one of the devices listed).
- 71% yes
- 29% no

Although the majority of teaching staff were given or had support to buy or loan devices, one in three said they did not. This is surprising given the frequent use of technology in teaching in higher education today but would require further research for a more nuanced understanding.

“We are not really set up to teach online. I have had to buy a monitor, microphone and camera to work from home. Only my laptop was provided by my school. Students expect good quality!”

Use of tools or features that assist users (could tick all that applied)

Half of teaching staff said that they used at least one of the following features, which are commonly found in many apps or pieces of software or tools and can assist users.
- 36% captions or transcripts on video
- 16% spelling or writing support
- 12% dictation: speech to text
- 9% alternative ergonomic devices
- 8% screen magnification
- 6% screen reader: text to speech
- 49% none of these

While nearly half said they didn't use any of these features or tools, 50% said they used at least one and over a third used captions or transcripts on videos. It's positive to see staff use these kinds of features for themselves, as well as possibly sharing them with students.
“I like the flexibility and inclusivity of using technology to accommodate students from all over the world and from a diverse range of backgrounds and abilities.”
Theme two: technology at your organisation

In theme two, we looked at the perceptions of teaching staff in terms of the quality of the online teaching environment, how well they were supported to access it off campus and at online communication. We also looked at the apps that they found useful in their teaching and their preferences for future investment.

Overall quality of online teaching environment

64% of teaching staff rated the quality of the online teaching environment as above average (best imaginable, excellent or good) and 11% rated it as below average (poor, awful or worst imaginable):

- 1% best imaginable
- 13% excellent
- 50% good
- 26% average
- 7% poor
- 2% awful
- 1% worst imaginable

What technologies were provided to support teaching staff?

Staff had access to a range of systems, platforms and applications to support their teaching:

- 91% virtual learning environment
- 87% live video classes
- 54% online assessment or testing platform
- 40% collaborative applications
- 35% dashboard for tracking student progress
- 2% none of these

Most had access to virtual learning environments and the ability to offer live video classes, but only just over half had access to an online assessment or testing platform and just over a third to a dashboard to track student progress. Technologies to support collaborative activities appear to be less well serviced, but more nuanced data may be revealed by further investigation eg using staff focus groups.

Support, communication and involvement

The percentages of teaching staff who agreed they were supported in using systems and services at their organisation and communicated with effectively online were:

- 55% supported to access online platforms and services off site (32% neutral, 13% disagreed)
- 47% communicated with effectively (37% neutral, 16% disagreed)
- 35% supported to use own devices (41% neutral, 24% disagreed)
- 16% given the chance to be involved in decisions about teaching platforms (35% neutral, 49% disagreed)

These figures seem low. Teaching staff need to be able to access online platforms and services when off campus, particularly when most staff were conducting at least some of their teaching from home during this period.
Teaching staff digital experience insights survey 2021/22 UK higher education (HE) survey findings

Future investment preferences

Teaching staff were invited to choose one item from four choices to indicate their preferred area for future investment, should funds be available:

- 37% upgrade platforms and systems
- 32% IT support
- 16% more computers and devices
- 14% specialist software for your courses

They expressed a preference for upgraded platforms and systems, closely followed by IT support.

Digital tools or apps staff found useful for teaching

Teaching staff were asked to give an example of a tool or app they found useful for learning. There were 2,576 responses to this question, mentioning 128 different tools or apps. Many of these tools or apps facilitate teaching delivery or access to learning and resources but the rising popularity of tools/apps such as Padlet, Mentimeter and Kahoot suggest an appreciation of opportunities to interact with students during online lectures and sessions.

The top ten tools or apps that teachers cited were:

- 18% Microsoft Teams
- 15% Padlet
- 12% Zoom
- 9% Blackboard
- 8% Mentimeter
- 5% Canvas
- 4% Moodle
- 4% Kahoot
- 3% Microsoft PowerPoint
- 3% Panopto

Figure 1. Word cloud showing the top ten most cited tools or apps that staff found useful for teaching.

“Consult staff as to whether the platforms and software are adequate.”
Theme three: technology in your teaching

In theme three we looked at how technology was used in teaching – the range of activities staff engaged in, where their teaching was taking place and how closely this met their preferences. We also asked teaching staff whether they had experienced any problems when teaching online.

Where online teaching took place (could tick all that applied)
Most teachers tended to conduct their online teaching from home but almost a third did it on site. Very little took place in public spaces such as cafes.
- 89% at home
- 29% on site
- 1% in public spaces eg cafes
- 1% none of these

“I like the ability to construct highly structured and well-paced materials that bring students to a good place of understanding.”

Mode of teaching – on site, blended or online
Over half of teaching staff indicated a preference for a mixture of on site and online teaching, which roughly aligns with what was experienced. At the time of the survey, mainly online learning was used more than twice as frequently as teachers preferred.

Preferred mode
- 39% mainly on site
- 53% a mix of on site and online
- 8% mainly online

Actual mode
- 30% mainly on site
- 49% a mix of on site and online
- 21% mainly online

“We need better access to IT support, particularly when you experience issues just before or during teaching – you can’t wait three days for someone to get back to you!”

Range of teaching activities (could tick all that applied)
The percentages of teaching staff who had carried out a range of online teaching activities in the two weeks prior to completing the survey were:
- 62% produce and upload course materials
- 56% live online lecture or class
- 42% record and upload a lecture or class
- 37% mixed face-to-face/online class
- 23% support online collaboration
- 9% moderate a text-based discussion
- 8% virtual lab, practical or field work activity
- 1% use virtual reality headsets in class
- 20% none of these

Less than a quarter engaged in activities involving collaboration, discussion, practical, virtual or field work. 20% did not engage in any of these online teaching activities.
Problems when teaching online
(could tick all that applied)

More than half of staff experienced one or more problems when teaching online although 44% reported none of those listed. Poor wifi connection remains a substantial problem for many teaching staff.

- 42% poor wifi connection
- 16% no suitable computer/device
- 14% no safe, private area to work
- 9% can’t access teaching platforms
- 7% mobile data costs
- 44% none of these

Convenience, fairness, impact and effectiveness of teaching online

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

- 66% was convenient for them (24% neutral, 10% disagreed)
- 32% allowed them to assess learners fairly (42% neutral, 26% disagreed)
- 31% allowed them to teach in the ways that they preferred (32% neutral, 36% disagreed)
- 30% enabled students to make good progress (43% neutral, 27% disagreed)
- 16% made them feel part of a community of staff and students (29% neutral, 55% disagreed)

High percentages of teaching staff disagreed with some of these statements. While two-thirds of respondents agreed that online teaching was convenient for them, less than a third were confident that it allowed them to assess learners fairly, to teach in ways that they preferred or that it enabled students to make good progress. Few agreed that online teaching supported the notion of a learning community comprising students and staff – in fact 55% disagreed.

“There are varied ways to receive feedback from students eg via chat, Mentimeter, Padlet or Miro. All of these can be used in online and in classroom-based learning as well.”
Theme four: developing your digital skills

How much support, guidance and training did teaching staff receive to help them develop their digital skills and use technologies effectively to teach online? In theme four, we find out more about the overall digital development support offered.

Training and support for skills development (could tick all that applied)

- 50% teaching online
- 44% equality and inclusivity
- 39% keeping student data secure
- 37% online teaching and assessment
- 36% creating accessible digital content
- 25% digital copyright and licensing
- 24% behaving safely and respectfully online
- 23% basic IT skills
- 19% delivering effective digital assessments
- 14% specialist software for teaching your subject area
- 15% none of these

While half of teaching staff surveyed had support for teaching online, few had received assistance with any other aspects of skills development listed. Some of these are legal requirements suggesting a mandatory training obligation that universities need to fulfil.

Overall support for effective online teaching

- 1% best imaginable
- 12% excellent
- 35% good
- 33% average
- 14% poor
- 4% awful
- 1% worst imaginable

48% of teaching staff rated overall support to teach effectively online as above average (best imaginable, excellent or good) and 19% rated it as below average. The satisfaction ratings are disappointingly low given the strong emphasis on digital staff development and support in recent years.

Support for online teaching and digital skills development

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

- 44% provided guidance about the digital skills needed in their teaching role (35% neutral, 21% disagreed)
- 16% provided with time to explore new digital tools and approaches (29% neutral, 55% disagreed)
- 14% provided with an assessment of their digital skills and training needs (36% neutral, 50% disagreed)
- 6% provided with reward and recognition for their digital skills (29% neutral, 65% disagreed)

Fewer than half of teaching staff agreed with any of these statements and high percentages actively disagreed. With an ever-increasing need to develop and maintain currency in digital skills, this is an area for concern.
“It would be good if someone could sit in as an observer when I am teaching and give me feedback and pointers.”

Where did teaching staff go for help with online and digital skills (could tick all that applied)

- 74% online videos and resources
- 73% teaching colleagues
- 48% IT staff
- 44% teaching and learning/e-learning staff
- 21% friends and family
- 15% other professional staff
- 10% library staff
- 2% I don’t look for help

59% of teaching staff sought help from three or more sources. Nearly three-quarters turned to online resources and/or to fellow teaching colleagues for help with online and digital skills. Far fewer called on other organisational forms of support such as IT, teaching and learning/e-learning or library staff.
“Focus less on digitalising existing processes and more on designing pedagogies and structures specifically for the online learning environment.”
Listening to what teaching staff had to say

Teaching staff were asked what they thought were the most positive and negative aspects of online teaching, and what one thing they felt their organisations should do to help them teach effectively online. Their responses are diverse but some common benefits and pitfalls emerge from among the individual likes and dislikes, which can inform future practice.

The most positive aspects of online teaching

There were 2,817 complete responses to this question with at least a one-word answer. Teaching staff were positive about:

- **The convenience of working from home** and of being able to continue to support students who were working from home, along with the efficiencies and savings in time and cost associated with the lack of commute.

  “It frees up time that I can give back to students in more engaging ways.”

- **The flexibility of teaching online** – in access, in managing time, the freedom from timetabling restrictions/pressures, being able to provide individual and one-to-one support and the ability to work around care and other responsibilities.

  “The ability to accommodate a large number of students in a session without room or timetable constraints is positive.”

- **The ability to support groups of different sizes** (large or small) from different geographic locations and to use breakout rooms to facilitate collaborative activities, group work and tutorials in a timely and responsive manner.

  “Being able to hold impromptu one-to-one or small group sessions with undergraduates is really helpful during revision time.”

- **Live and recorded lectures** being available and shared online ensures that students can catch up if sessions are missed, supports recap, deeper understanding and inclusivity. Those for whom English is not their first language benefit. It also allows sessions to be delivered in shorter chunks.

  “Lecture recordings are convenient for both students and teachers.”

- **Increased attendance, active engagement and participation** during classes using a variety of online tools and use of chat to engage/interact, ask questions and give feedback. Some of the less confident students were also encouraged to contribute. The variety of tools available opened up new ways of communicating and getting student participation and feedback.

  “Students may want face-to-face but more of them voluntarily chipped in to online seminars, if only via chat.”

- **The variety of online tools** and the option to combine multiple tools, pieces of software and media to create engaging materials that can be used (and reused) to support, supplement and develop student learning as well as to facilitate collaborative and/or autonomous learning opportunities.

- **Enhanced user accessibility**, being able to reach a more diverse student body and be more inclusive.

- **Being able to continue teaching safely** throughout lockdown without worrying about COVID-related issues.
The most negative aspects of online teaching

There were 2,966 complete responses to this question (at least one-word answer). Teaching staff were negative about:

- **Limited interaction and engagement from students.** It was difficult to tell if students were engaged or to read their body language and it could be hard to motivate and engage them, particularly if they did not turn their cameras on. Some students were reluctant to contribute and teaching staff found it hard to ‘read the room’ – to gauge and understand student progress or who needed help, to judge the mood or sense how the sessions were being received.

> “It is very hard to gauge student progress when screens are off and interaction is not as it would be in a live class. The pace of teaching and learning suffers as a result.”

Some teachers said it could feel like speaking into a void and be hard to get discussion going or to manage breakout rooms, especially for large groups. Others described the learning behaviours of students as passive, noting that some observed that students were logging on but were inactive and not attending or participating.

> “I feel it promotes a passive approach to learning. I can only look at a screen with no cameras on for a short time. It does not promote relationships with and among students in class.”

It could be difficult to design meaningful activities for some practical subjects or where discussion and debate is a key element.

- **Technical issues and lack of support** was still perceived to be a problem. Not all staff were provided with the equipment or software they felt they needed and some reported having to purchase this at their own expense. Broken equipment was not always repaired or replaced. Access to reliable wifi of sufficient speed and bandwidth causes problems for teaching staff directly, and student wifi issues disrupted even the most well-planned online session at times. Interoperability issues where software performed differently on different platforms or devices undermined staff confidence to use some technologies. Teaching staff were concerned about fair access to technologies – for themselves as well as digital equity for students.

> “The resources provided by the university need further investment to make them more reliable and robust.”

- Some teaching staff felt that **online teaching was more time and labour intensive**, describing some elements as laborious, exhausting or causing fatigue. They found the multi-faceted nature of technical skills development, pedagogic design, navigation of various platforms, systems and software to be complex. When combined with the need to overcome technical issues (both their own and that of students) while delivering a high quality and interactive session, this was sometimes overwhelming.

> “I don’t have the time to do or learn how to do all the things I’d like to do. I am busy firefighting which leaves little time for developing new things.”

- Teaching staff felt there was a **missing sense of community and social connection** in online learning which made it difficult to build a rapport or supportive relationships with students.

> “It completely removes the student from the atmosphere of learning. Debate is almost entirely expunged, feedback is difficult and there is no feeling of society any more.”

- Other concerns raised included the possibility of cheating or **misconduct in exams**, the **intrusion** of their teaching role within their private life and concerns about online platforms creating a space for anonymous **harassment of teaching staff**.

> “I’m using my own laptop in my own home and feel I’m never away from work.”
Improving the effectiveness of online teaching

Teaching staff were asked what one thing their organisations could do to help them to teach effectively online. There were 2,466 complete responses to this question (at least one-word answer). They would like organisations to:

- Support research, develop/co-design, test, refine and understand effective practices in online teaching, learning and assessment. They recognised the need to constantly review and update their practices.

> "It’s fine having the training but transferring this into effective practice is a challenge. The learning curve is steep and ongoing."

- Provide ongoing training and support for staff. A variety of approaches were suggested including:
  > Drop-in sessions
  > Short-focused guidance
  > Professional assistance to produce videos and teaching materials
  > Hints and tips
  > Regular newsletters highlighting ‘easy wins’ and sharing effective practice
  > Regular and consistent training
  > Opportunities to shadow those modelling effective practice
  > Clear navigation to portals sharing information, guidance and resources
  > Skills assessments and audits
  > Opportunities to work with IT and e-learning specialists
  > Dedicated teams of specialist e-learning designers and ‘on call’ experts
  > Defined standards to guide practice illustrated by examples
  > Digital departmental onboarding sessions to support new staff
  > Establish communities of practice
  > Advertised sessions available at times suitable for full and part-time staff
  > Incentives for innovation

- Scheduled time to develop new approaches, skills and resources. Teaching staff asked for allocated time to reflect the additional responsibilities involved in developing well-researched and trialled approaches to using technology effectively within programmes of learning. This needs to accommodate aspects of pedagogic design, skills development, accessibility and other legal obligations. They expressed a preference for this to be addressed in a holistic way; encompassing individual and team/school planning processes, with an array of support options to back this up.

> "It’s not that training isn’t offered, it is that there is no time to spend on it. Workloads prohibit investing any time on this."

- Improve and integrate online learning platforms in consultation with teaching staff, subject specialists and students. Streamline systems and design for student engagement in learning and assessment.

- Provide good technical support for staff with clear access pathways, robust helpdesk management and personnel available to support at the point and time of need.

- Provide quality IT equipment or software for staff and students – not all felt that they, or their students, had equipment with a high enough specification or software of a professional enough standard, to meet their work/learning requirements. An appropriate space to deliver their teaching or to support student learning was also a requirement – a shared office with others endeavouring to do the same is just not suitable. Some universities provided individual pods that teaching staff could book to ensure professional and uninterrupted practice. Some offered rooms suitable for hybrid delivery.

> “Ensure we have suitable spaces, technologies and connections. Anything else is just window dressing.”

- Improve student engagement by supporting and encouraging them, too – for example, with digital badges, guidance on effective approaches for using and engaging with digital technologies, codes of conduct for staff and students and an outline of participation expectations.
To achieve digital success, teaching staff need rewards and support

Better and more targeted support from IT and leadership teams will drive forward digital transformation

The continuing digital transformation of the higher education (HE) sector is challenging teaching staff, students and leaders to redefine their needs and ambitions. They will need help to deliver the best educational outcomes.

Changes to the curriculum, initially driven by the pandemic, are now being reviewed and developed to meet students’ new expectations and needs. Digital solutions could also help higher education institutions (HEIs) scale provision to meet increasing student numbers through the rest of this decade.

Our survey found that just 48% of respondents felt the digital support they received was above average and only 6% of those who teach feel they are rewarded or recognised for their digital skills. Critically, only 14% of respondents to our survey were provided with an assessment of their digital skills and training needs.

Teaching staff also struggle with digital inequalities, just like their students: nearly a third of survey respondents said they did not receive support to loan or buy the devices used in their teaching practice, 42% reported difficulty with wifi connections, and 16% reported no suitable laptop or device.

Without more support and recognition for teaching staff, digital practice will struggle to progress.

Digital is a tool. A tool with strengths and weaknesses, like any other. But with the right investment – in digital infrastructure, curricula and assessment design, and digital skills development – teaching staff can deliver world-class educational experiences that match student expectations.

As the Office for Students’ blended learning review has recently found, using digital elements in courses is not inherently good or bad, and no course should aim to increase digital use purely for economic or efficiency reasons. The application of digital elements should be driven by pedagogical needs.

Investment must be applied strategically, with top-level buy-in. Senior leaders can’t delegate digital transformation; it’s vital they engage with the possibilities and challenges it presents.

Holistic, long-term planning with a responsive and agile approach will allow HEIs to capitalise on the opportunities of digital transformation and blended learning. These include improved student experience, deeper insights into curricula performance, robust scalability and cost savings through efficiency.

With these elements in place, universities can use digital to support a world-leading student experience.

Key steps universities can take now

Support strategic investment in digital

Digital transformation of the curriculum needs to be adopted in a strategic, holistic way and advocated and supported by senior leaders across the sector. It requires a joined-up approach that combines the skills and knowledge of pedagogical experts, students, professional services and learning technologists. This degree of coordination and investment needs board-level commitment.

Without the support of vice-chancellors, chief information and digital officers, human resources and finance leaders, any transformation efforts will run the risk of being uncoordinated, badly planned and left unsupported by training and procurement initiatives.

Invest in the digital skills of staff

The survey showed that only 44% of respondents received guidance on the digital skills needed in their teaching role, and just 37% received training and support for teaching and assessment online.

Training and support are vital elements in delivering a digital curriculum successfully, but they need to be considered in two ways – short-term and long-term objectives.

An agile, responsive approach is needed in the short term to address immediate staff concerns and respond to student expectations. We recommend combining this with a long-term, strategic approach, which actively identifies areas where investment in
continuing professional development, including digital capabilities, would aid curriculum and assessment design. This will help HEIs deliver on the promise of digitally enhanced courses.

Investing in staff, including enhanced reward and recognition schemes, will allow universities to respond to student needs, improve their experience and increase resilience in the systems and processes provided by the HEI.

It also affects staff wellbeing issues: a recent study by Wray and Kinman found 53% of higher education professionals who responded reported symptoms similar to depression. Investing in training and support is more important than ever. It will help staff retention, reduce days lost to sickness and boost an HEI’s ability to deliver top-quality courses with integrated digital elements.

**Design ‘digital first’**

Delivering an excellent student experience requires a holistic approach to curriculum and assessment design.

Find ways in which digital technologies can enhance course and assessment design to meet the needs of students more effectively. It is important that leaders also invest in staff development and training for curriculum design, empowering teaching staff with the right support.

This will result in raised student satisfaction and outcomes, increased teacher recognition and retention, and tangible returns on investment from the effective use of digital within a course.

**Fight digital inequality**

Many teaching staff have been dealing with similar challenges of digital inequality to students during the pandemic and beyond: wifi problems, data costs and getting hold of the right equipment are all issues they face, but these struggles are rarely part of the wider discussions about digital transformation in the sector.

HEIs must ensure their staff are supported to have the right equipment, connections and skills to thrive in a blended future.

Universities can begin to engage with the challenge of digital transformation via Jisc’s building digital capability service, which can identify training needs and help target resources. They can also capture an essential snapshot of their digital posture through Jisc’s digital insights surveys.

Universities can contact their relationship manager to discuss what support Jisc can offer.
Get involved

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

Our 2022/23 digital experience insights surveys are now open.

If you would like to find out more about the digital experiences of your teaching staff or if you are interested in participating in our other surveys for students, 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 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, 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

Approaches to curriculum and learning design across UK higher education

Looking beyond the emergency responses to lockdowns and restrictions – are we delivering learning in flexible and accessible ways?

Read the report, approaches to curriculum and learning design across UK higher education.

Let’s work together to transform your digital experience

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