JISC

Developing Digital Literacies

The JISC Developing Digital Literacies Programme promotes the development of coherent, inclusive and holistic institutional strategies for developing digital literacies for all staff and students in UK further and higher education.

As we move further into the 21st century, the worlds of work, citizenship, culture and learning are increasingly digital. We need to be digitally literate to be able to access opportunities to live, work and learn.

Digital literacy: those capabilities which fit an individual for living, learning and working in a digital society.

The JISC Developing Digital Literacies Programme, which runs from 2011 to 2013, is funding twelve projects in UK colleges and universities and collaborating with ten sector bodies and professional associations to improve digital literacies.

Supporting the development of digital literacy is a key government concern. This means that universities and colleges have an increasing responsibility to develop digitally literate graduates in order to meet student expectations and the demands of employers, in addition to addressing wider concerns regarding the competitiveness of the UK workforce in global markets.

There is also a recognised need for universities and colleges to develop a digitally literate workforce, ensuring that all staff acquire the digital professional expertise needed in an environment in which research, teaching, administration and academic practices are increasingly digital.

This briefing paper explores some of the themes emerging from the JISC Digital Literacies programme, drawing on outputs such as the summaries of the project's and association's baseline reports, researched and written for JISC by Helen Beetham.

Employable graduates need to be digitally literate

Students who do not fully engage with the potential of digital technologies are not only less effective in their study and but are less employable on graduation.

> The main focus for us was that digital literacies is not just about studying, it's about life skills and about employability skills, the idea being that unless people are digitally literate... they are going to struggle to function in a modern society and a modern workplace, so as educationalist then obviously we feel as though we've got a responsibility for that

Dr Andrew Eynon, PADDLE Project, Coleg Llandrillo

> Around 90% of all new graduate jobs require a high level of digital skills

Race Online 2012:
www.raceonline2012.org/stories/jobcentre-plus

Employers stress that being digitally literate is an essential attribute of an employable graduate. Employers value the skills of flexibility and want graduates who can communicate effectively via digital media and critically judge the validity and reliability of information found online.

The Digital Literacies in Transition project at the University of Greenwich is aiming to develop a more 'agile' curriculum that is responsive to the changing world of employment and is looking at ways of involving employers in the curriculum development process.
The University of Reading's Digitally Ready project is focusing on students' employability and researching how work placements and specific resources such as a toolkit designed to support students to manage their digital identity are impacting on the overall digital literacy and career-readiness of their students.

> The main driver for developing digital literacy for arts graduates is employability. Arts and design students are going into an industry in which they need to build themselves as a brand so they need the digital capabilities that go along with that such as creating websites, using social media for professional gain and networking, developing an online portfolio and managing an identity in the digital age

Lindsay Jordan, DIAL project, University of the Arts.

Digital literacies are often related to discipline area

The use of digital technologies has changed aspects of knowledge practices and the nature of subject expertise across the academic disciplines. However our evidence suggests that digital academic practices are shaped by the culture of the discipline in which they develop and that the digital expertise required by academics is in applying digital practices, such as the use of social media, to their discipline.

> The use of digital technologies and media by researchers potentially is changing what it means to be an effective researcher or skilled academic/professional in higher education

John Igoe, Developing Digital Literacies Baseline Report, Vitae.

Acquiring the digital practices of a particular discipline is also amongst the indicative practices of digitally literate students. It is important for students' emerging academic and professional identities that they gain practice in the specialist technologies and methods of their subject area.

The **University of Bath, Professionalism in the Digital Environment (PRiDE)** project is exploring what digital literacy means in different disciplines. Project outputs include faculty specific digital literacy frameworks and statements detailing the desirable discipline-related digital attributes of learners in each of four faculties.

> A digitally literate person in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Science is critically and ethically aware, confident in engaging in a wide array of digital practices, resources/tools and academic and professional environments, and establishing coherent identities

PRiDE project, University of Bath

Emerging practices with digital technologies

Learners need to be supported by staff to develop academic digital literacies

Despite improvements in support for the use of personal digital devices and practices on campus such as the provision of power sources, wifi and access to third party applications, students report feeling less digitally competent in their learning lives than they do in their personal lives.

Although students may have an array of personal digital practices, evidence suggests they are heavily reliant on the guidance of staff in developing learning-related and academic digital practices.

> Digital literacy is the intersection between digital knowhow and academic practice. Or, if you want to frame it differently, the ability to learn, the ability to learn well. What we have presently in colleges and universities is a generation of students who have a high degree of digital knowhow on the whole, but it's much more varied than their academic knowhow, which is gained through formal learning

Helen Beetham, Synthesis Consultant, Developing Digital Literacies Programme

Professional development is vital in developing digital literacies

Professional development needs to focus less on the adoption of specific new technologies and more on how meaningful tasks which explore authentic academic digital practices can be embedded in curriculum learning and how emerging digital practices might be usefully recontextualised in an academic setting.

Professional associations are supporting their members to improve digital literacies

JISC are working with sector bodies and professional associations to address the development of staff digital expertise across a range of roles. Staff working in academic, research, administrative, library, learning resources, careers development and support roles are all key in realising the digital literacies agenda.

Two examples of the work being undertaken by professional associations include:

The **Association of University Administrators (AUA)** has added a digital literacy element to their framework of professional behaviours, and the **Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA)** is developing ways of exploring professional accounts of digital literacy.

> The Digital Department project focuses on teaching administrators and recognises their importance as a staff group to supporting the development of the digital environment in departments but also contributing to the digital literacies of other academic and support staff and students

Alison Gilry, The Digital Department project, University College London

Sector bodies and professional associations supporting the programme:

The Association for Learning Development in Higher Education, **www.aldinhe.ac.uk**

Association for Learning Technology (ALT), **www.alt.ac.uk**

Association of University Administrators (AUA), **www.aua.ac.uk**

Heads of Educational Development Group (HEDG), **www.hedg.ac.uk**

The Organisational Development in Higher Education Group (ODHE), **www.lfhe.ac.uk/networks/od/odgroup.html**

The Standing Conference on Academic Practice (SCAP), **www.kcl.ac.uk/study/learningteaching/kli/conferences/scap.aspx**

The Staff Development Forum, **www.staffdevelopment.ac.uk**

Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA), **www.seda.ac.uk**

Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL), **www.sconul.ac.uk**

Vitae, **www.vitae.ac.uk**

Engaging students supports digital literacy development

An emerging trend, being captured by the Developing Digital Literacies Programme is that of students being involved in supporting the digital literacy development of their peers and in the reverse mentoring of staff.

Examples of students working as pioneers and change agents included, digital skills 'clinics' being run by postgraduate and IT support staff, student user groups set up to share tips and tricks in the use of certain digital tools e.g. data analysis software and the involvement of students in the development and testing of new services and applications (apps).

One of the challenges raised is how to meaningfully involve students as change agents and how to reward participants and ensure their continued involvement.

The **Institutional Student ePioneer Partnerships (InStePP)** project led by **Oxford Brookes University**, has developed a reward and recognition programme for its Student ePioneers that includes:

» An Institute of Leadership and Management approved course run by the careers centre for all ePioneers

» An optional independent study module which allows the students to use their ePioneer experiences as basis for study and gain academic credit

» 1 years free membership of the Association for Learning Technology (ALT)

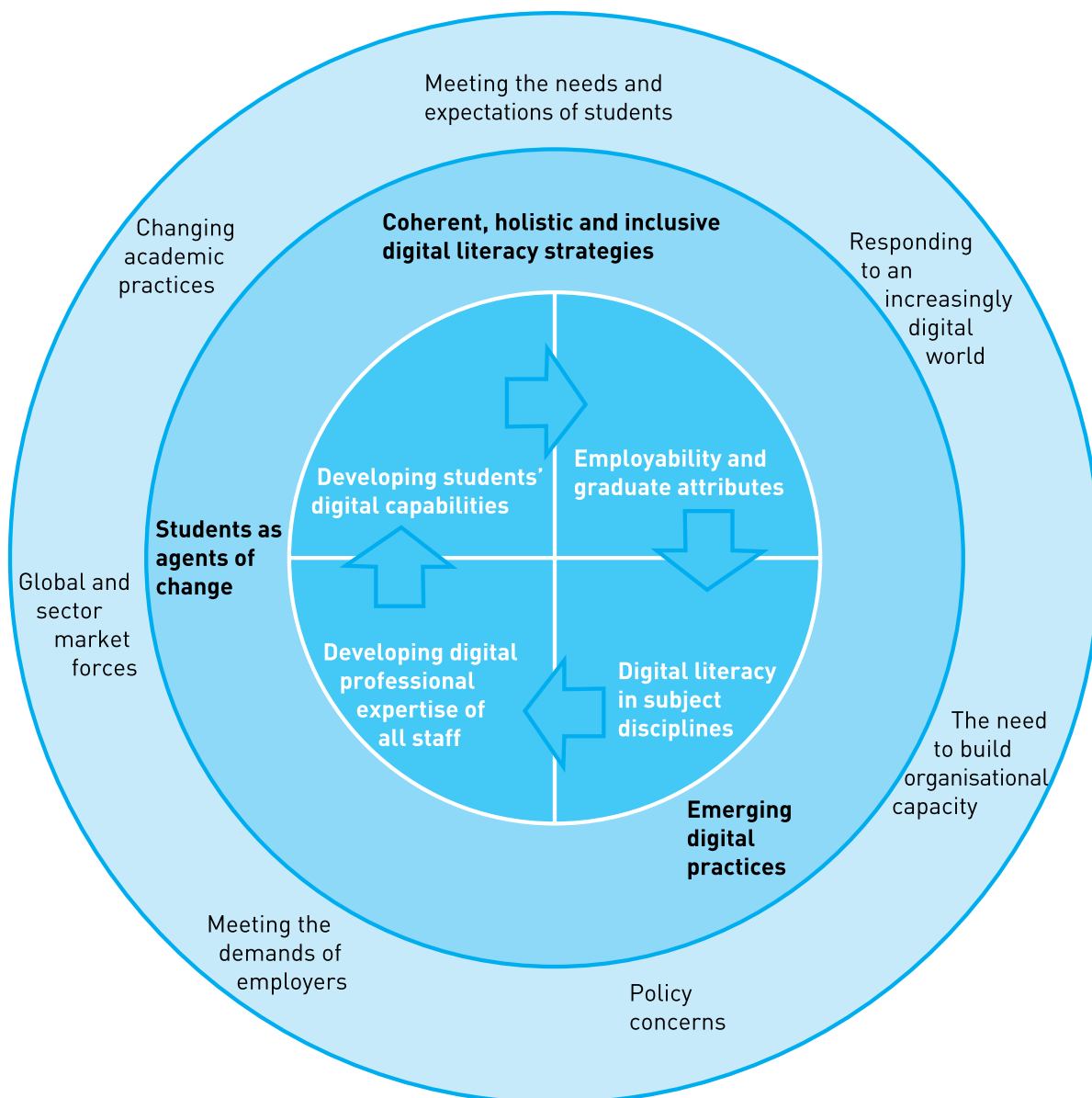> It's like an internship, good experience for my CV

Student ePioneer, InStePP project, Oxford Brookes University

Emerging themes

The emerging themes discussed in this paper sit within a wider context of developing digital literacies for all staff and students in UK further and higher education. They are interrelated pieces of a rich and complex picture of the digital literacy landscape in universities and colleges.

As the Developing Digital Literacies Programme continues new themes will emerge to feed into the growing body of knowledge which will support institutions to develop coherent, inclusive and holistic digital literacy strategies.

The Developing Digital Literacies Programme, drivers and emerging themes:

Meeting the needs and expectations of students

Changing academic practices

Coherent, holistic and inclusive digital literacy strategies

Responding to an increasingly digital world

Students as agents of change

Developing students' digital capabilities

Employability and graduate attributes

Global and sector market forces

Developing digital professional expertise of all staff

Digital literacy in subject disciplines

The need to build organisational capacity

Emerging digital practices

Meeting the demands of employers

Policy concerns

Further Information, Resources and References

Further details can be found at the JISC Developing Digital Literacies Programme page: **www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearning/developingdigitalliteracies**

Digital literacies resources on the Design Studio: **http://bit.ly/designstudiodiglit**

Digital literacies workshop materials: **http://bit.ly/jiscdiglitworkshops**

JISC On Air radio show on digital literacy: **http://jisconair.jiscinvolve.org/wp/2012/04/24/deliveringdigital-literacy/**

Developing Digital Literacies Baseline Report, Vitae: **http://bit.ly/LdzJU6**

Summary of the projects baseline reports: **http://bit.ly/JiUV0m**

Summary of the professional association baseline reports: **http://bit.ly/KWFJUo**

Supporting Learners in a Digital Age: **www.jisc.ac.uk/publications/briefingpapers/2011/slida**

Learning Literacies in a Digital Age: **www.jisc.ac.uk/publications/briefingpapers/2009/learningliteraciesbp**

Visitors and Residents: What Motivates Engagement with the Digital Information Environment? **www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/projects/visitorsandresidents**