

Quick guide - Developing students' digital literacy

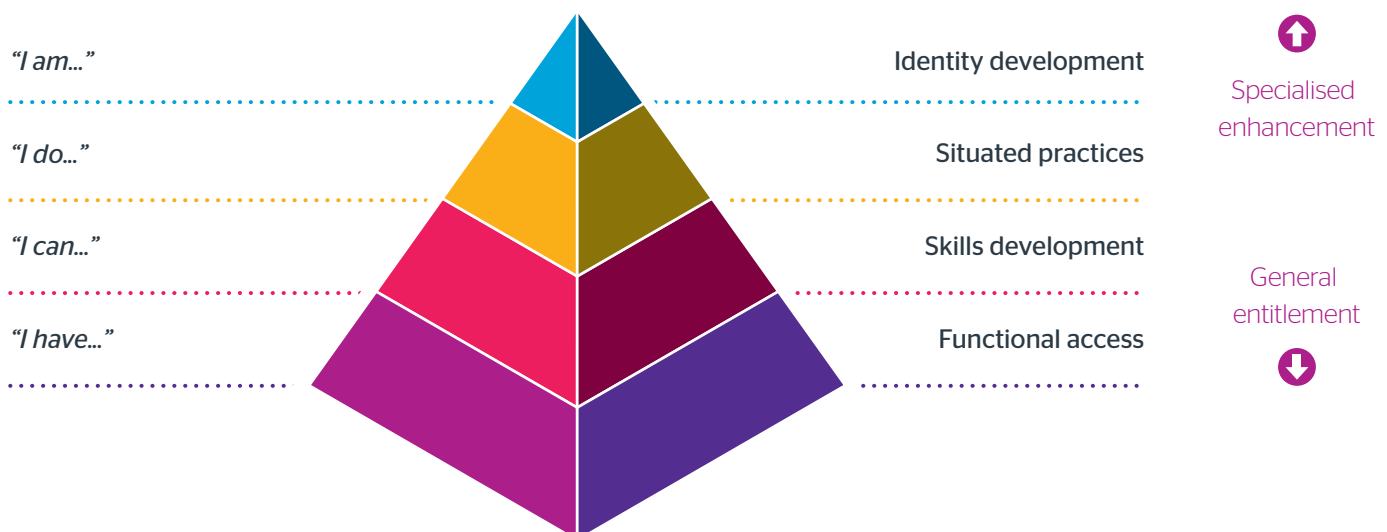
Digital literacies – the capabilities which fit someone for living, learning and working in a digital society

A key role for universities and colleges

Digital literacy is a broad and holistic concept that embraces much more than the functional IT skills that students need to survive in a digital society. Although many students are skilled technology users, they do not usually come into further or higher education armed with all the digital competencies they need to thrive in their academic lives and in employment. This highlights a key role for universities and colleges to support students to develop differentiated, specialised and advanced digital literacy skills, above the general core entitlement that students expect.

We develop literacy skills over time, becoming increasingly proficient and fluent with support and practice. Beetham and Sharpe's framework (2010) highlights how this developmental process relates to digital literacy - from access and functional skills to higher level capabilities. Crucially, it recognises that digital literacies will vary according to context so it also reflects how individuals can be motivated to develop new skills and practices in different situations.

Defining digital literacy: a general model



Beetham and Sharpe (2010)

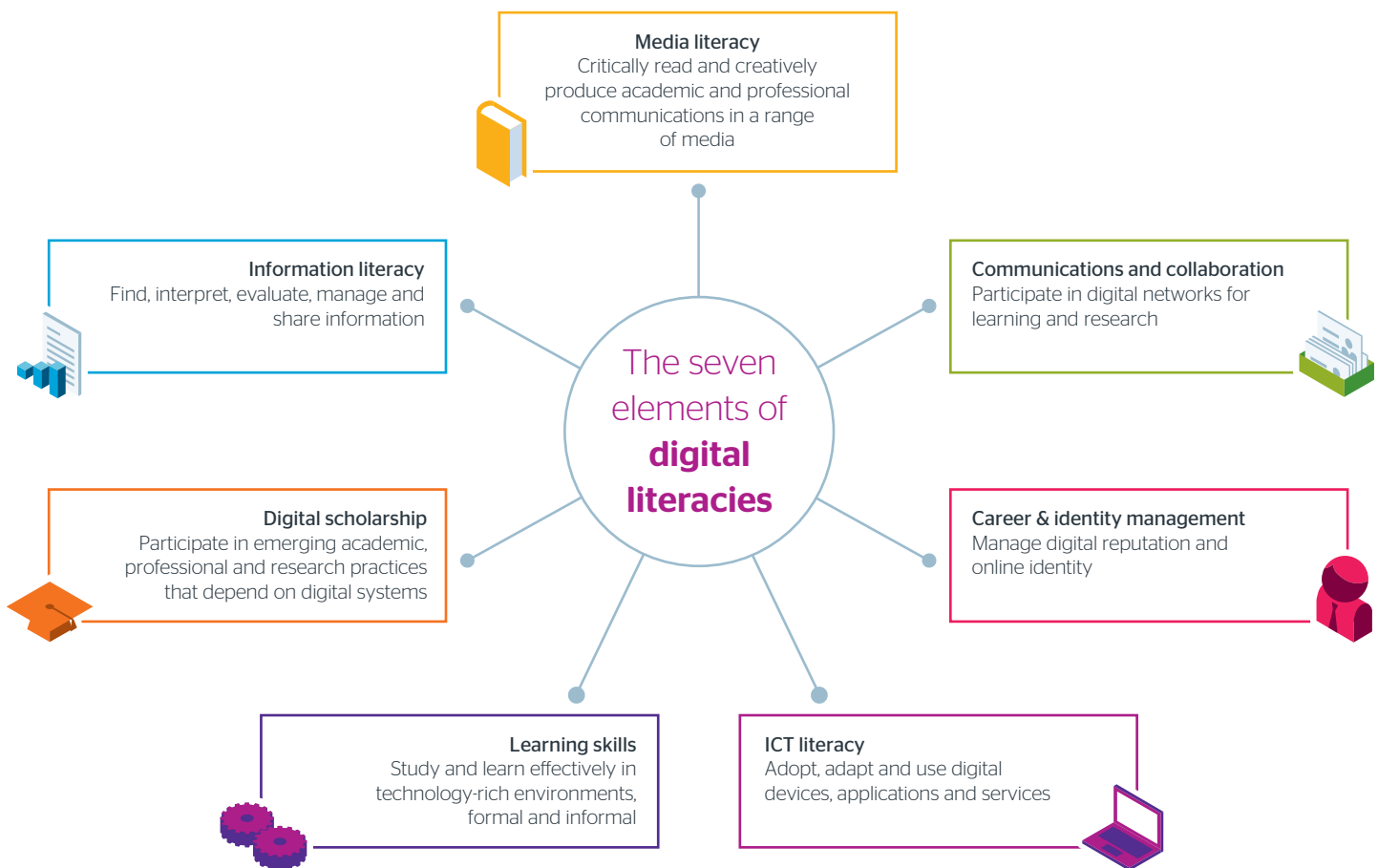
Context is fundamental

As the curriculum is the main focus of students' attention it is naturally the best place for educators to demonstrate and reinforce appropriate digital practices. Embedding authentic activities into the curriculum offers meaningful examples of professional and discipline-specific digital practices. Contextualised and tailored support is also important - a 'one size fits all' approach will not suffice.

Discussion between stakeholders is essential: managers, teaching staff and students need time to explore what digital literacies mean to them. Their understanding will depend on role, discipline and the institution's mission, values and priorities. Our model outlining seven elements of digital literacy may be used to stimulate this discussion and to explore the breadth of practices and the relationships between the elements in any given context. This may help to build a shared understanding of how digital literacy skills might be developed, supported and evaluated.

Our Digital Literacies infoKit offers detailed guidance and examples of curriculum change and our Design studio resource provides further guidance, tools and resources to facilitate curriculum design that develops students' digital literacies.

i At the University of Bath staff and students worked together on the Professionalism in the Digital Environment (PriDE) project to define and develop digital literacies within subject disciplines; identifying discipline-specific statements and outcomes. This provided a differentiated but coherent model that was applied across the university. It has also led to the accreditation of learners' digital literacies through the Bath Award and to support for students in creating and managing professional online identities.



Engaging students and staff - a partnership approach

Because context is critical, the skills, attitudes and practices modelled by lecturers are highly important: institutions therefore need to consider how best to support the development of digital literacies for staff as well as for students.

Staff-student partnerships are powerful in driving change and in sharing complementary skills. Engaging students as change agents, researchers, co-developers, and champions harnesses their unique understanding of their peer group needs and combines this with the wealth of subject, pedagogical and sometimes technical expertise that staff bring to the partnership. Neither staff nor students need to be technology experts when they start to engage with digital literacies: communications skills, flexibility, creativity and an eagerness to learn and share are more important.

A range of tools and resources to support the personal development of digital literacy skills for staff and students is available from the Design studio and from the Jisc Change Agent Network.



The Learning Zone at the University of the Arts, London is an innovative peer support and co-mentoring initiative which employs students alongside professional staff, providing a dynamic social learning space that supports the development of study and transferable professional skills.



The Worcestershire College of Technology Digital Literacy (Wordle) project team found that students were generally more confident in using social media and that staff were more confident in finding information. They responded by creating new resources for both staff and students, now available as Moodle courses or Open College Network units of credit which can be used towards a qualification.

Graduate attributes and employability

Digital literacies are fundamental to students' long-term success and personal economic well-being. Employers are increasingly recognising the benefits of employing people with the knowledge and skill to harness the potential of technologies and social media and may use this to differentiate between potential employees.

Many institutions see a natural synergy in linking digital literacy initiatives with other priorities such as developing graduate attributes, employability and transferable skills. These connections ensure students experience a fully integrated and holistic approach and mitigate against digital literacies being regarded as 'yet another thing' that staff and students need to accommodate.

Supporting students to develop an online professional identity can be motivating; open practices and online portfolios ensure students have evidence of their achievements. Involving careers services in this work is beneficial, as is linking the development of digital skills to institutional awards.



One of the primary drivers of the Institutional Student ePioneer Partnerships (InStePP) project at Oxford Brookes University was to explore the potential benefits of bringing together three strands of the university's strategy for enhancing the student experience: graduate attributes, employability and student engagement. Their student ePioneers benefitted from partnering with staff and enhanced their employability skills.

Reviewing your support for digital literacies

An audit can help you identify what is already being done and may reveal gaps in provision or areas of overlapping support. Further guidance on this strategic aspect is available from our Digital Literacies infoKit.

We have developed a SWOT analysis tool to support providers to develop an institutional approach to digital capability. The tool uses a series of questions and prompts drawn from the experience of other universities to encourage reflection on five key areas:

- » Strategic environment
- » Organisation
- » ICT environment
- » Curriculum
- » Student experience

Our Evaluation digital services infoKit offers an insight into the behaviours and motivations of learners as they go about using the web.



The University of Exeter has developed a useful diagnostic and audit tool 'What type of digital learner are you?' to encourage learners to reflect on their digital capabilities.

Start a conversation

In any large organisation there will be a variety of digital practices. Surfacing these can widen awareness of the importance of digital literacies across the institution as well as put experts and innovators from different areas in touch to share approaches and build momentum.



At the University of the Arts, London, the Digital Integration of Arts Into Learning (DIAL) project developed six communities of practice to support staff and students to embed digital literacy in their day-to-day practice and to improve graduate employability. The communities have provided a sustainable model for promoting effective practice and encouraging collaboration across the organisation.

Join the community

To find out what we and others in our community are doing to support the development of students' digital literacy visit bit.ly/diglit-infokit. You may also like to join our dedicated digital literacy mailing list at jisc-diglit-public@jiscmail.ac.uk

Resources

For links to all the resources mentioned in this guide please see:

- » **Jisc Change Agent Network**
changeagentsnetwork.co.uk
- » **Jisc Design Studio** bit.ly/jiscdsddl
 - › **Digital literacy themes**
bit.ly/jiscdsddlthemes
 - › **Digital literacy resources index**
bit.ly/jiscdsddlresources
- » **Jisc Developing Digital Literacies infoKit**
bit.ly/diglit-infokit
- » **Jisc Developing Digital Literacies Infokit case studies**
bit.ly/diglit-casestudies
- » **Jisc Evaluating Digital Services infoKit**
bit.ly/evaldigservs-infokit
- » **Jisc Digital Student project**
digitalstudent.jiscinvolve.org/wp
- » **Jisc Developing digital capability institutional SWOT analysis**
bit.ly/jiscdlswot
- » **University of the Arts Learning Zone**
arts.ac.uk/study-at-ual/library-services/learning-zone
- » **University of Exeter online diagnostic quiz for learners: What type of digital learner are you?**
bit.ly/learnerquiz



Contact details

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