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A critical focus on digital literacies

Developing students' digital literacies for living and working in 21st century is a global issue (Lee 2014). In the UK there have been calls for a greater focus on digital literacy in higher education from the QAA (2014), NUS (n.d.) and House of Lords (2015) driven, in part, by changes to graduate employment brought about by globalisation (Beetham 2015). Digital literacies are clearly a topical issue within UK HEIs, however these reports tend to focus on strategic and operational issues, and to offer little in relation to critical debate. This symposium address this gap by exploring institutional responses to notions of digital literacy in a rigorous and critical way. It consists of 6 papers each of which takes a different aspect of the topic:

Whitworth's paper asks *Do digital literacies have politics?* He traces the history of the term and how it is used to support powerful interests in society. He argues that the dominant political discourse of digital literacy is shot through with tensions and contradictions.

Secker's paper, *The trouble with terminology: rehabilitating and rethinking 'Digital Literacy',* explores the notion of digital literacy from the perspective of library services. She asks what does digital add to, or change, in our notions of literacy?

Jefferies' paper is titled *Digitally literate or merely digitally competent? Exploring technology ownership and use among HE students in two non-UK environments.* She provides a student perspective and international dimension to the topic. Based on the findings of a survey of students' responses to digital learning literacies in Australia and Germany she notes similarities across these two countries which resonates with the literature drawn from the UK (White & Beetham 2013).

Reedy's paper (*Life-changing learning or ticking the box?: evaluating engagement with the OU's digital and information literacy framework*) uses two theoretical lenses (Bruce et al. 2006; Whitworth 2014) to analyse the impact of the OU's framework for students' digital literacies and the extent to which it has been effective in achieving its aim of integration of digital skills into the OU curriculum.

Bennett's paper, *The case for a curriculum development approach to developing students' digital literacies,* suggest a way forward for addressing the issue of how to develop students' digital literacies across an institution. She proposes a curriculum design approach and argues that its strength is in understanding the question of ownership in three different ways.

The paper by Rees and Loughlin *Digital Literacy - New wine in old bottles?* reworks Sharpe and Beetham's (2010) digital literacy framework arguing for a version which foregrounds students' independence over institutionally defined models.

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Whitworth, A. (2014) *Radical information literacy: reclaiming the political heart of the Information Literacy movement,* Chandos.

Chair – tbc

Symposium Convenor Dr Liz Bennett

Discussant Dr Joe Nichols