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Duty, Dennis James

The use of information technology and social media to support transition

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# **The use of information technology and social media to support transition**

# Literature review

- On “How can technology be used to improve the learner experience at points of transition?” has now been completed by the University of Bradford.
- Conducted in association with the Evaluation of Learners' Experiences of e-learning Special Interest Group (ELESIG) and funded by the Higher Education Academy.
- Transition was considered in a broad sense and the resources discussed offer examples of activities and findings on the use of technology at various stages or points involved: pre-entry and induction, early experiences, first year and later engagement and beyond into employment.
- Projects and studies often aim to improve the learner experience at/during these stages by engaging students and supporting their needs, and strive to address the factors influencing withdrawal, retention and successful transition that have come from wider research.
- Review offers examples of key projects/studies/initiatives: case studies; journal articles; and guides or overviews. **ADD PROJECT LINK**

# Review themes

The review outlines how technology can be beneficial and why its use could be considered desirable. From the resources, a number of key themes are identified and discussed. These include:

- **Dealing with preparedness and anxiety reduction**
- **Social integration and peer interaction**
- **Academic integration and skills development**
- Information communication
- **Ongoing engagement/maintaining participation throughout transition**
- diversity and inclusion
- **Being student centred**
- **Connecting to students' use of and skills with technology**
- **Using technology to identify those 'at risk' during transition and to facilitate student support**
- Using alternative and blended approaches to learner needs
- Issues concerning staff involvement in initiatives
- Possible problems, concerns, barriers and contrasting views on the use of technology - in particular, the danger of homogenising students and the importance of addressing diverse learner styles, needs and experiences and making the use of technology meaningful and relevant.
- Wider issues for consideration – such as institutional approach, consistency, design and evaluation and the need for further research in this area.

Overall, the resources indicate that there are no magic tools which by themselves can solve all the problems students may encounter during the transition process ; the use of technology needs to be carefully considered in light of diverse students – many urge the importance and centrality of the student voice and acknowledging and supporting all backgrounds, needs, preferences and transitions.

# Pre-entry support and aiding early transition

- A number of projects and studies have employed technology to aid the process of transition into university by helping students to settle in and adjust, to reduce anxiety and deal with change.
- Initiatives involve online activities and resources and the opportunity to communicate with others prior to arrival, during induction and into the early stages of university life.
- Work is often focused on helping students to feel prepared, ready and connected, managing their expectations and allowing skills development to begin.

# Social interaction and integration

- Social Networking Sites in particular are highlighted for addressing homesickness and allowing new connections to be made – offering a sense of community and belonging.
- Other technology such as SMS, virtual environments and Instant Messaging (IM) are also noted for their ability to offer social ‘presence’ and reassurance that others are experiencing similar problems and challenges.
- The benefits of using technology to support interaction with students already at university, for peer mentoring and for communication with staff are also noted.

## Skills/academic development and 'learning to learn'

- Various initiatives are using technology in transition for the development of skills, both for academic and study purposes and also for personal development, self-assessment and for 'learning to learn' at university.
- Reflection, motivation and autonomy are raised as positive attributes that technology can foster
- Plus its ability to prepare students for life after graduation in terms of marketplace technologies and the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills required by employers.

# Maintaining engagement and participation

- Studies discuss how technology and e-learning can aid ongoing participation and motivation over the transition through the academic cycle.
- Various 'e-tivities' are being used to enhance engagement by providing richer learning environments and innovative practice, flexible learning and ongoing peer collaboration
- aiding the engagement and transitions of remote students



# Student centred approaches & Connecting with student use of technology

- Key features of this revolve around offering flexibility of access, choice and an increased sense of control and empowerment over learning.
- Personalising experiences and valuing and utilizing the student voice
- putting the technology into learners' hands, fostering student creativity and moving beyond passive learning.
- supporting 'reluctant' learners
- a tool for obtaining student feedback.
  
- connecting with technologically aware and skilled students and appealing to and learning from the 'net generation'.
- Students use technology in their everyday lives and HEIs need to channel and respond to their skills and preferences in order to engage them.
- However, skills problems are raised by others, both around students not necessarily being able to use devices for *educational purposes*
- Caution against treating students as a homogenous, technically competent group who would all benefit from technology.
- Learners are diverse, have different abilities, styles and needs and *all of these* need to be taken into account when considering technology and transitions.

## **Identifying 'at risk' students and student support**

- The literature reveals potential for technology to highlight and support students seen to be 'at risk' during transition by identifying those who may be struggling and providing an opportunity for timely information and interventions.
- The ability and potential of technology to aid all students – to troubleshoot issues, offer individual support and provide cohesive and integrated support services.

# Evaluation and impact

The literature review also discusses findings in terms of the impact of using technology

- some evaluations can be limited to the perceived success of the individual project rather than the wider outcomes
- examples of impact have been reported and can often be aligned to the JISC key “tangible benefits” of an e-learning approach such as: improved student achievement, skills and retention; savings in staff time/resources and positives for inclusion and widening participation.
- Both quantitative and qualitative information is felt to be important and student feedback highlights the value of technological initiatives on experience during transition, although there are mixed views from students on their perceptions of technology.

How can the use of technology be evaluated for its impact/benefit on transition , retention or progression? – Your examples? Ideas?