A Digital Learning Strategy for the University of Surrey

Background

Rapid advances in technology have changed the meaning of 'digital'. The concept has evolved from an attribute of objects to a more commonplace description of how our lives are now interwoven by technologically mediated processes. Digital, like the Internet, is embedded, embodied and everyday.[1]

With this in mind, the digital learning strategy provides a vision of how an institution can nurture and sustain a rich portfolio of digital learning opportunities - opportunities that enable students to thrive in a modern digitally connected society.

Digital learning is **seamless**. This critical dimension of interconnectedness enables individuals to move **fluidly** across multiple learning spaces, be they personal, institutional or professional. Learning therefore is not wholly bounded within the institution. The digital learning strategy must be ready to embrace new technologies and new ways of learning, such as augmented and virtual reality, wearables, maker spaces, inquiry and problem based learning, active learning spaces and open online education.

Digital learning is student focussed. It aligns staff and support services around the provision of learning opportunities based on a contemporary understanding of digitally based personal and professional lives.

Vision and aims

The University of Surrey is a successful, enterprising and forward looking institution with a digitally capable staff and student body. The university has built a strong reputation for learning and teaching, a reputation embodied within the policy, processes and mechanisms that support these core functions.

To maintain this reputation, a supportive digital learning environment must be:

- **Agile:** able to adapt to as well as influence the changing educational and professional needs of a digitally enabled and connected society;

- **Expansive:** offer rich opportunities and spaces for learning that extend beyond the institution;

- **Seamless:** provide fluid pathways between these various learning spaces.

- **Empowering:** give the learner more control of and responsibility for their learning and development.

A supportive digital learning environment:

1. Connects students, academics and ideas, and acknowledges pathways to future employment;
2. Opens up access to educational opportunities;

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[1] Hine, C. (2015). *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied and Everyday. London: Bloomsbury.*

3. Embraces digital fluency as a key competence for students and staff working in the future;

4. Promotes the use of active learning spaces to motivate innovative shifts in pedagogy;

5. Provides seamless links between formal and informal learning contexts;

6. Raises and consolidates the university's profile as a global education provider;

A digitally enabled institution should be recognised by the seamless learning setting it provides, whereby a person experiences a continuity of learning across a combination of locations, times, technologies and social settings. For example, it may be intentional, such as when a learning activity starts in a classroom and continues through an informal discussion with colleagues, or online at home. It can also be unplanned, for example when an interesting piece of information from a journal or news programme sparks a conversation with friends. Seamless learning can be a collective or an individual process. It can extend across time and locations, offer ubiquitous access to learning resources, encompass physical and digital worlds, engage multiple types of device, and integrate different approaches to teaching and learning.[2]

Achieving and supporting the vision

To achieve this vision requires the articulation and integration of a range of stakeholder agendas, policies and strategies. The critical elements that underpin the realisation of what might be termed a digital learning framework include the following:

1. University Learning and Teaching strategy (*Current Version: 2010-17, approved*);

2. Technology Enhanced Learning Strategy (*Current Version: 2012-17, approved*);

3. Library Services Strategy (*Current version: Strategic Plan 2014-15 and beyond, approved*);

4. IT Services Strategy (*Current Version: in development*)

5. Student representation through the key committee structures within institution.

The University Learning and Teaching Strategy, Technology Enhanced Learning Strategy and Library Services Strategy are in a mature state and have been through the relevant approval processes of the University Learning and Teaching Committee and Senate.

Further consultation and collaboration between the key stakeholders responsible for delivering the digital learning strategy will align the overall strategic vision and the development of agile and responsive future facing policies. These efforts will continue to be supported by a strong community committed to the ongoing enhancement and transformation of the University of Surrey's world class learning and teaching environment.

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[2] *Sharples, M., McAndrew, P., Weller, M., Ferguson, R., FitzGerald, E., Hirst, T., Mor, Y., Gaved, M. and Whitelock, D. (2012). Innovating Pedagogy 2012: Open University Innovation Report. Milton Keynes: The Open University*