



The Impact of Flexible Learning Spaces on First Year Art & Design Students' Attitudes to their Learning Experience within Higher Education



COLOURING BETWEEN THE LINES



BACKGROUND



Current approaches to learning within art and design tertiary education have evolved as a result of a changing sector, economy and diverse student population. Traditional teaching and learning methods have been increasingly complemented with flexible learning spaces that enhance the learners experience both inside and outside the classroom. The opportunity they provide allows self-directed exploration by the student and aims to be both motivational and informative. But what do the students think?

This project was awarded a Higher Education Academy Individual Teaching Development Grant and aimed to evaluate the impact of flexible learning spaces on student attitudes to their learning experience. Does the use of flexible learning spaces promote confidence and ultimately competence?

How much has this change, if any been facilitated by embedding technologies into the curriculum design to enhance learning? As educators what do we need to hear that will inform our future approaches to and implementation of flexible learning strategies? The rationale for such a focus is rooted in the 'evolution' or revision of approaches to successfully engage students in their learning by using technology as a tool to facilitate elements of that engagement (Race 2011, Brindley 2011). Wider economic and cultural changes have also impacted upon the tertiary sector, with increased pressure for universities to become more flexible and diverse to ensure a sustainable sector (Hartley 1995). Much of these changes have informed current teaching and learning approaches (Blair, Orr and Yorke, 2012).



ENGAGEMENT



Race (2011) argues that as engagement is key to successful learning, academics must be open to adjusting their approaches in order to cause that engagement to occur. The structure of this project was designed to make the optimum use of dissemination routes as a means of maximizing impact. From the outset the involvement of the student body and colleagues was considered and their engagement a central component. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data collection were used; student views were collected through questionnaires, focus group sessions and the project website. A number of colleagues or 'critical friends' provided feedback on the project framework and activities and the project website and blog was used to initiate wider discussions.

References

- Blair, B., Orr, S., Yorke, M. (2012) 'Erm, that question... I think I probably would've just put something in the middle and sort of moved on to the next one, because I think it's really unclear': *How art and design students understand and interpret the National Student Survey*, GLAD Report, Higher Education Academy, York.
- Brindley, L. (2011) 'Seizing the opportunity for online learning', pp.81-83, Coiffait, L. Ed (2011) *Blue Skies: New thinking about the future of higher education*, Pearson Centre for Policy and Learning.
- Hartley, D. (1995) The 'McDonalidization' of Higher Education: *food for thought?* pp 409-423, *Oxford Review of Education*, vol.21, Issue 4 Race, P. (March 2011) 'Getting Students Engaged', pp2-7, *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*, Issue 3

IMPACT



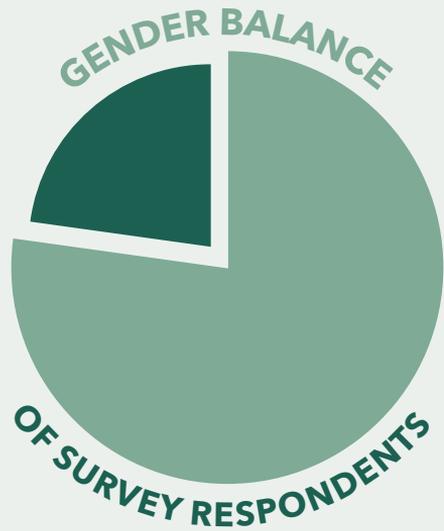
The project results would support the view that the changing profile of the undergraduate student will demand greater flexibility and engagement with supported learning resources to fit with their study, personal and work circumstances (Brindley 2011). Following presentations about the project activities and outcomes at both internal events and external conferences, positive feedback was received from colleagues who considered the research timely, especially for course teams reviewing their support of teaching and student engagement.

SUSTAINABILITY



The environment in which we operate is in continual flux, its sustainability and the scrutiny which is it under can result in the facilitation of new developments and approaches. The student experience is central and they should be engaged as active participants in their learning. The successful integration of new technologies into tertiary teaching and learning experiences, it could be argued, should be commonplace, part of the delivery not a replacement. The impact of these developments can be significant, if the sectors key objective is to achieve a sustainable and cohesive learning community for the future.



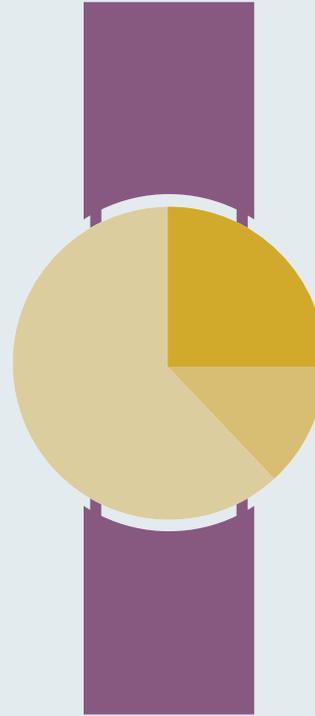


MALE

23%

FEMALE

77%



3-5 HOURS

AVERAGE PER WEEK
SPENT USING THE
ONLINE RESOURCES

HOWEVER, NO SIGNIFICANT
RELATIONSHIP WAS FOUND
BETWEEN THE RESPONDENTS'
PERCEPTION OF THEIR
IMPROVED KNOWLEDGE
AND THE AMOUNT OF TIME
THEY SPENT USING ONLINE
RESOURCES



APPLICANTS THAT
STRONGLY AGREE
ON IMPROVED
CONFIDENCE

71%



APPLICANTS THAT
STRONGLY AGREE
ON IMPROVED
KNOWLEDGE

86%

“

The resources are very helpful and easy to use. They are a positive and fun way of increasing knowledge and confidence.

Through the resources if I had any questions I knew I could just email my lecturer.

Loved everything was available 24/7.

The range of available resources is a real support to students, they help us with our research abilities and there is good further reading material to expand on what we have learned in the studio.

There was a wide range of resources that can support all if not most of the students.

They were there when you needed them.

I liked how I could have access to it anywhere.

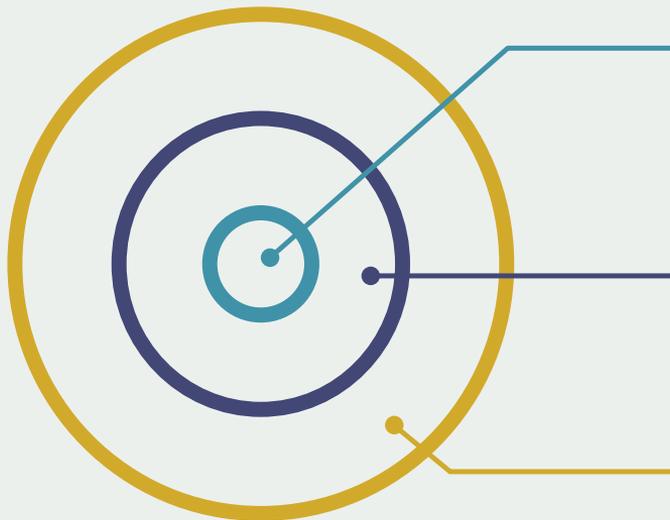
With lots of resources available it's very easy to access them.

Assignments are so stressful, having resources there where you can easily find them and use, is one less thing to worry about and saves time.

Information relevant at the time is always available for viewing or download which is really helpful during my studies.

”

FUTURE DIRECTIONS



THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE IS CENTRAL & THEY SHOULD BE ENGAGED AS ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN LEARNING

THE SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES INTO TERTIARY TEACHING AND LEARNING, IT COULD BE ARGUED, SHOULD BE COMMONPLACE, PART OF THE DELIVERY NOT A REPLACEMENT

THE IMPACT OF THESE DEVELOPMENTS CAN BE SIGNIFICANT, IF THE SECTOR'S KEY OBJECTIVE IS TO ACHIEVE A SUSTAINABLE AND COHESIVE LEARNING COMMUNITY FOR THE FUTURE

CONTACT

www.colouringbetweenthelines.com

Louise O'Boyle
University of Ulster
Belfast School of Art
York Street, Belfast
N. Ireland
BT15 1ED

email: lm.oboyle@ulster.ac.uk
twitter: @louobo

