

Literacies in the Digital Age Research with JISC and the ESRC

The study surfaced a range of literacy support models implemented in universities. Digital literacy is now central to what higher and vocational (further) education can offer. By 'digital literacy' we mean the capabilities required to thrive in and beyond education, in an age when digital forms of information and communication predominate.

Starting point

Digital forms of information and communication are transforming what it means to work, study, research, express oneself, perhaps even to think. These transformations challenge the core business of universities – to produce and disseminate knowledge through research and teaching – and could have a profound impact on learning. The requirement to learn is now a lifelong and increasingly also a life-wide imperative, with learning opportunities integrated into work and leisure.

Important questions around whether universities and colleges can support learners' development of digital literacies, how literacy development be supported and under what conditions remain. In this study we aimed to assess the digital literacies and capabilities required by learners, identify support provision required for literacy development, and surface current shortfalls in support. making recommendations for the future.

Method

Data was collected over four phases: literature review; competence framework review; analysis of 40+ case examples of digital literacy support; 15 audits of digital literacy in universities across the UK.

Research Findings

Viewing literacies as situated knowledge practices has real implications for learner support. There is a tension between two perspectives on literacy development; literacies as social practices and as competency development. Although competency frameworks are being used as a

guide for embedding literacies within programmes, their application is effective only when learners develop digital literacies through immersion in diverse knowledge practices that are constitutive of identity. Literacy development is most effective when embedded as authentic tasks in programmes of study; explicit exploration of academic and professional practice in digital environments; when academic and support staff have opportunity to explore the changing modes of scholarship and professionalism; consideration of how academic communication is constructed and how different media are used; through recognition of learners' existing knowledge practices as resources for learning.

Shortfalls in literacy support are due to cultural and organisational constraints that inhibit the embedding of digital knowledge practices. To better prepare students for future challenges, university staff should be prepared to radically change their own practices. More information is at www.editlib.org/p/89791

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