

York St John University

Piloting the discovery tool (January 2019)

A way for all to work together



Image: York St John University

“It was really invaluable to have a ready-made solution, especially for a small institution without the capacity, time and resource to develop something like this. It is a great end-product based on years of development, all done in consultation with the sector.”

Phil Vincent, educational developer (TEL), York St John University

Project aims: a strategic drive to develop digital capabilities for staff and students

A new digital strategy with a cultural rather than technical emphasis was introduced at York St John University in 2018. Of the eight main objectives in the strategy, two focus specifically on digital learning and teaching and digital capability. These aim to ensure that all staff and students have the digital skills that they need to succeed. Having followed Jisc’s work on digital capability over several years as well as earlier pilots of the discovery tool, taking part in the 2018 pilot was the next logical step.

The university’s technology enhanced learning (TEL) team was already working with the library teams on digital and information literacy and the Jisc [digital capabilities framework](#) provided a way for all to work together using a constant framework and common terminology. Tailored profiles such as the [learner profile](#) also offered a way of framing digital capabilities that students could relate to.

Other work already underway includes working with human resources and recruitment personnel to ensure digital capabilities requirements are integrated in their work flows by, for example:

- Identifying minimum desired levels and making these explicit in job descriptions
- Referring to the Jisc profile for HE teachers in academic vacancies, highlighting the capabilities that successful applicants should be able to demonstrate
- Ensuring digital capability developments are signposted and recognised in appraisal and performance monitoring processes. The discovery tool is a practical tool that the university can use during appraisals to support reflective practice
- Making digital capabilities development and support part of the induction and onboarding process for new staff

Jisc’s work and resources on [how HR teams can support staff digital capability](#) were also very valuable.

Implementation approach

The pilot ran during May 2018 at York St John university. Approximately 30-40 people took part, mostly staff as the time of year meant that many students were involved in examinations or were off campus. The library, TEL, careers and IT training teams all participated and anecdotal feedback was positive.

The opportunity to take part in the pilot was presented at subject director and learning and teaching forums. The careers team participated both from their own perspective and that of using it with students.

Strategies for implementation varied according to audience:

- Professional services staff can feel left out of initiatives like this, so the university ran a couple of workshops where participants had time to discuss and unpick the model and framework behind the discovery tool and to think about what was important and relevant to them. They then went away to use the discovery tool individually before coming back to the group on a separate occasion to share results. This provided an opportunity for them to discuss things such as lower scores in areas like digital creation which may be less relevant to their roles
- The [HE teacher profile](#) and [learner profile](#) have been a good starting point for engaging academic teams when talking about curriculum design. This is particularly important given that employability is a significant strategic driver and it highlights the importance of embedding digital capability in curriculum activities as well as acknowledging this in graduate attributes. The aim is that the curriculum will be 'digital by design'. A coaching approach has been adopted with academics to ensure that their needs are fully explored and that they are supported to work out the most appropriate solution for themselves. Setting it in context and showing the benefits and potential impact for them and their students helps staff to see the relevance of digital capabilities development
- The careers team are involved in the drive towards digital capabilities and are guiding the students to use the discovery tool to reflect on and self-assess their digital capabilities as part of their operations.

Outcomes and impact

It is too early yet to be able to report any definitive impact but the engagement from the pilot and early findings are being used to support a wider-scale roll out and various related activities:

- The information gained from overall data gathered by the university is being used to inform and tailor training sessions. Colleagues that participated in the pilot tended to self-assess digital creation and use of the virtual learning environment lower than perhaps might be expected and so the TEL team are planning to deliver workshops on things like using video and animated content
- York St John University run a SEDA accredited training programme supporting staff with TEL related aspects of their work. The qualification was revalidated in summer 2018 and use of the [discovery tool](#) to benchmark themselves has been included in the first module, entitled Digital Practitioner
- The university also took part in the pilot of the [digital experience insight survey](#) and are sharing the outcomes from their survey to send a clear message that the university is tackling some of the bigger issues and that digital capabilities are not just an individual responsibility

Tips for others/lessons learned

- Taking part in the pilot with a relatively small number of participants has allowed time for discussion and to develop holistic approaches to using the tool aligned to other key priorities
- Work to engage specific teams and consider their particular needs means that channels have been established for a wider roll out across the institution as the university moves forward with the building digital capability service in 2019 and 2020

Next steps

Going forward, the university plans to work with learning and teaching leads (nine schools, each with their own learning and teaching lead) and subject directors to encourage them to share the discovery tool with their communities. In terms of use with students, the university is working with the students' union and through their course representatives to encourage students to think about their digital skills and how they can develop these further. The careers team will also be using the discovery tool with students.

The university is keen to make use of the opportunity to add in their own resources to the discovery tool and feel this is an area where their users (staff and students) will see additional value.

The TEL team are also continuing their work with HR, the onboarding officer, the staff development team and those responsible for the appraisal system to ensure digital capabilities are embedded sensitively in their work flows and in ways that are supportive. Use of the discovery tool will be an explicit task that new staff are required to do as part of their induction and that existing staff do prior to appraisal to help them set their own objectives.

Contact

Phil Vincent, educational developer (TEL), York St John University (p.vincent@yorks.ac.uk)