

Forum Insights for Teachers in Higher Education

REPORT

Online Learning Task Force,

Collaborate to Compete: Seizing the Opportunity of Online Learning for UK Higher Education: Report to HEFCE by the Online Learning Task Force (January 2011), http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/hefce1/pubs/hefce/2011/1101/11_01.pdf

Key insights for teachers

Providing online learning

- The provision of higher education should be student-centred (p.4).
- 'Online programmes need to be of comparable quality and standard to other programmes' (p.5).
- 'Technology needs to enhance student choice and meet or exceed learners' expectations' (p.5).
- 'Using open educational resources can [...] provide a cost-effective way for teaching institutions to offer greater choice to students by embedding high-quality shared expertise in their courses, from national and international sources' (p.18).
- There needs to be ongoing professional development for staff to ensure they are sufficiently aware of technology and deliver programmes that meet student ICT needs and expectations' (p.17).

Student-engagement with online learning

- 'Students expect high-quality, flexible online learning experiences' (p.3).
- 'Online distance learning (ODL) provides students with the flexibility to study at their own pace, in their own time and at a location convenient to them' (p.10).
- Students' expectations in respect of technology-enhanced and online learning are increasing'.
- 'Students prefer a choice in how they learn—information and communication technology (ICT) is seen as one of many possibilities, alongside part-time and traditional full-time learning' (p.8).
- 'Learners are increasingly able to navigate high-quality, open and online resources' (p.9).
- However 'students need greater support to ensure their study and academic literacy skills are fit for the digital age' (p.5).
- 'Students prefer to be regarded as partners in the development of online learning rather than mere recipients' (p.8).
- 'Learning environments and contexts are becoming increasingly participative and the learner's contribution is highly valued by teaching professionals' (pp.9–10).
- 'A major concern for students is the) lack of personal [...] contact with their tutors and fellow students in online learning. Learning in virtual worlds is a possible solution for students, as is use of effective online conferencing. [...] Institutions need to enable students to [...] learn collaboratively online' (p.17).

- 'Students value the incorporation of ICT into their learning experience but the extent to which this occurs varies depending on course, type of study and assessment' (p.8).
- 'Students expressed concerns regarding the ICT competencies of lecturers [...], with 21 per cent of students thinking their lecturers need additional training' (p.8).
- National student surveys have the potential to increase understanding of students' experiences of online learning and technology.

Opportunities

- Online learning may help to prepare students for higher education, thereby improving retention.
- Online learning should encourage a greater diversity of students to participate in higher education.

Challenges

- The development of online learning is challenging because technological change is more rapid than the development of pedagogy for its exploitation.
- Staff contractual arrangements can inhibit engagement with online learning if, for example, hourly quotas are assigned to teaching time.