

Briefing: Jisc Digital Insights Survey

September 2021

Introduction

The Jisc Digital Insight Service gives organisations data on how students and staff are using the technology they offer, and suggest improvements to be made.¹ The insight survey they conduct, which has been running since 2016, shares feedback from over 38,000 students on their online learning experiences from 2020/21, covering 41 different universities.²

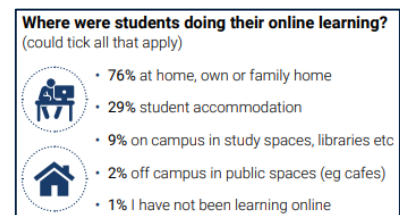
Key Findings

The survey covered four key themes regarding online learning:

1. You and your current learning situation

The survey identified a number of issues encountered when learning online. Of those surveyed, 63% of respondents said they had problems related to poor Wi-Fi, connectivity and 24% cited mobile data costs as an issue. Respondents from Black/African/ Caribbean backgrounds were more likely to say they had no access to a suitable computer/device.

The survey also found that most students were taking part in online learning from home. However, it is worth bearing in mind that this survey was conducted between October 2020 and April 2021, when stay at home restrictions were often in place in the UK.

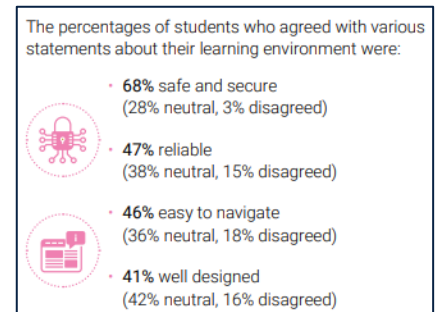


Respondents were also asked about their use of assistive technologies, such as screen readers and dictation. 16% of respondents said that they used at least one of four assistive technologies but only 40% of those who said they used them were offered support to do so.

2. Digital platforms and services at your organisation

When asked about their learning environment, most respondents felt that this was safe and secure, however far fewer felt that it was reliable, easy to navigate or well designed.

On the issue of organisational systems, most respondents generally agreed that they were able to access organisational systems, with 68% stating that they were 'enabled to access online systems and services from anywhere', compared to just 7% who disagreed. However, only 46% of respondents felt that technology in their organisations 'provided a good online environment for collaboration'.

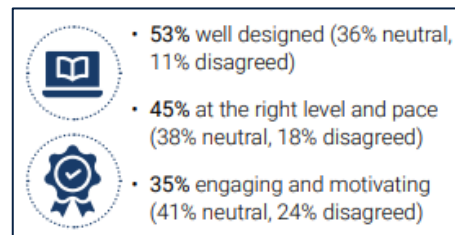


¹ <https://digitalinsights.jisc.ac.uk/what-is-digital-insights-experience/>

² <https://repository.jisc.ac.uk/8487/1/Student%20DEI%20HE%20report%202021%20Final.pdf>

3. Technology in your learning

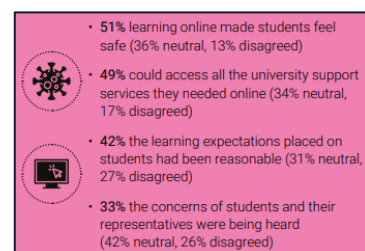
A number of respondents reported being dissatisfied with the quality of online learning materials, with less than half of those surveyed saying that they thought this was taking place at the right level and pace, or was engaging and motivating. However, when asked about the overall quality of online learning, 67% of respondents rated it as 'best imaginable', 'excellent' or 'good'.



With regards to the range of learning activities, 84% of respondents reported taking part in a live lecture or teaching session in the previous 2 weeks. However, fewer students reported taking part in more collaborative online activities, with only 36% working on a group project and only 17% doing a virtual lab, practical or field work in the previous fortnight.

4. Digital Skills

Respondents were positive overall about the support they received for online learning, with 60% of all respondents rating it as being either 'best imaginable', 'excellent' or 'good'. However, questions were raised regarding respondents' confidence in online learning, particularly whether the expectations placed on students had been reasonable and whether the concerns of students/ reps were being listened to.



The survey also showed that there is a long way to go in the sector with regards to developing digital skills, with only 41% of respondents agreeing that they had received guidance about the digital skills needed for their course, and only 26% stating that they had received an assessment of their digital skills and training needs. Of those who had been offered support or training, the most common areas respondents reporting receiving this in were learning online (54%) and avoiding plagiarism (51%).

Positive Aspects of Online Learning

The survey analysed over 28,000 free text responses to this question, highlighting the following areas:

- » Access to recorded content.
- » Interactivity and ease of communication.
- » Small groups.
- » Appreciation for help and support.
- » Convenience and safety.

Negative Aspects of Online Learning

From the free text responses to this question, the following negative areas were also highlighted:

- » Impact on university experience.
- » Technical and access issues.
- » Online learning can be unengaging.
- » Fatigue and concentration.
- » Isolation and loneliness.