EUNIS 2020: STUDENT PARTNERS AS DIGITAL AGENTS OF CHANGE

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1. Summary

This presentation explores the role that student partners are playing as digital change agents and drivers for change in the development of individual and organisational digital capabilities. It draws on case studies and institutional examples from participants engaged in the Jisc change agents' network (Jisc, 2015-19) and other related initiatives across the UK. The change agents' network was established to support staff working in partnership with students and to drive change in implementing technology enhanced learning. The change agents' network has successfully transitioned from a Jisc funded project that evolved over several years to a community owned network with an annual conference.

By offering insights into institutional practice from across UK higher education we aim to demonstrate the value of partnerships where students, staff and, in some cases, employers work together on initiatives to enhance practice and to make a positive change within their institutions in areas such curriculum design, the development of staff and students' digital capabilities and employability skills. Student partnerships are driving forward innovation and digital practice across Europe and the resources from the Jisc change agents' network can further support and extend these initiatives.

2. EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Building digital know-how is an economic priority

Within Europe there has been a focus on developing digital skills for all with the implementation of the European Digital Competence Framework (DigComp) (European Commission, 2018). Significant investments are needed to ensure all citizens have the digital capabilities to live, learn and work in a digital society. It is anticipated that the new Digital Europe Programme (European Commission, 2019), will focus on building the strategic digital capacities of the EU and on facilitating the wide deployment of digital technologies, to be used by Europe's citizens and businesses.

Within the UK, the government expectation that by 2037, 90% of all jobs will require some element of digital skills (Skills Funding Agency, 2016), there is an acknowledged need to invest in building digital know-how (Beetham, 2015), capability and resilience. 'The value of digital capability in economic terms for the UK' is acknowledged as 'enormous' (House of Lords Select Committee on Digital Skills, 2015), and technological innovation features heavily in the 2017 government white paper *The UK industrial strategy* (GOV.UK, 2017).

Yet other reports show a mismatch between the skills employers need (both now and in the future) and the preparedness of the workforce to meet or rise to these demands. An international review (IPPR, 2017) noted that graduate work is being transformed by cognitive automation. Almost all high-value jobs now require excellent digital skills, while routine white-collar work is being replaced by algorithms. The Government's report on Digital Skills for the UK Economy (ECORYS UK, 2016) found that 72% of large firms were suffering a shortage of high-tech labour and pointed to the 'challenges in

matching the speed of change in the education sector… to the rapidly changing skill sets needs in the economy and society.' The UK is falling behind many other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries when it comes to young people's digital literacy (OECD, 2016) and we still have a way to go before staff in UK colleges and universities have the required skills to meet these challenges.

Student-staff partnerships model behaviours that will help to establish digital agility and resilience and provide processes and protocols that can support future work, study and personal ambitions.

Digital student partnerships – an effective way of building a digitally capable and resilient workforce

Through the Jisc change agents' network (Jisc, 2015-19) we have seen evidence that the student-staff partnership approach is enabling universities to deliver effective student engagement activities. This approach also engages students in meaningful and active dialogue about the digital aspects of their learning experiences.

Partnership approaches create opportunities to explore the role of technology in supporting students' studies and in preparing them for employment. They provide opportunities for all parties to bring varied skills, knowledge, expertise and enthusiasm to the table. They facilitate personal and collective growth, giving rise to new learning.

Wider institutional benefits include the development of unique student-led approaches to obtain a goal, non-compartmentalised results, 'fresh-eyes' and importantly the benefit of working with people with the passion to make a difference.

This presentation will discuss how student partners are supporting the development of digital innovation in the following ways:

- Digital partnership initiatives that support the development of employability skills
- Partnership approaches designed to develop and embed digital practices within curricula
- How student partnerships are supporting the development of both organisational digital capability as well as the digital capabilities of individuals

Feedback from participants show that student partnership initiatives are effective and engaging. The impact is particularly powerful and empowering for those directly involved but when implemented in a holistic way can have a much wider reach and value. They add to the student experience over and above study ambitions and offer valuable and authentic learning and developmental experiences. The reasons for engaging are usually intrinsic from both the student and staff perspectives – wanting to develop new skills, professional and curriculum practice, or seeking to make a difference to the student experience or the university generally. Reward and recognition for achievement and the contribution partnership work makes is important. This may be financial, via Higher Education Achievement Record transcripts and university awards, as a clearly mapped route to professional recognition or through professional development review processes.

Student partnership models with a digital focus are perhaps an easy and non-threatening way in to partnership working with an open acknowledgement that all parties bring different skills sets (but don't assume it is students that have all the digital skills). This can help to establish an equal partnership process and relationship as articulated by Healey et al (Healey et al., 2014:7).

Different models are emerging of how students, staff and employers are working together: these may involve research, curriculum design, producing digital artefacts, providing consultancy, delivering and supporting training, mentorship and more. Many digital student partnership projects have a strong focus on developing the digital capabilities and employability skills of students but the potential outcomes are so much richer. Not all partnership models will have digital as an explicit focus but it is very likely that digital capabilities and their development will feature during implementation.

What is clear is that student partnership models are not just models for change, but models that facilitate lasting and meaningful change. With the student partnership projects in evidence across

Europe, students are driving forward innovative digital practices. Lessons learnt and resources from the Jisc change agents' network can further support these initiatives and encourage the wider sharing of practice.

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Biographies

Sarah Knight

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Sarah is Head of Change: Student Experience at Jisc. Sarah manages the teams supporting the Digital experience insights service (digitalinsights.jisc.ac.uk) which is researching staff and students' expectations and experiences of the digital environment and the team who are developing the Jisc Building digital capability service (digitalcapability.jisc.ac.uk) to support the development of staff and student digital capabilities.

Sarah has established the Change agents' network (https://can.jiscinvolve.org), a national network to support staff-student partnership working on technology enhanced curriculum projects. In recognition of Sarah's work and influence on research into students' experiences of technology, she held the vice-chair position of ELESIG (http://elesig.ning.com/) from 2017-2018. ELESIG is a community of researchers and practitioners from higher, further and skills sector education who are involved in investigations of learners' experiences and uses of technology in learning.

Sarah established and runs the Jisc Student Experience Experts Group, an active community of practice, which provides valuable consultation and dissemination opportunities for Jisc.

Sarah has worked for Jisc for 16 years and during her time at Jisc has led large transformation projects on curriculum design, digital literacies and learners' experiences of technology. Prior to Jisc Sarah worked for Becta developing staff development programmes for college staff and Gloucestershire College as Information learning technology co-ordinator.

Sarah has a Master of Science degree in Chemistry and is a Certified Member of the Association of Learning Technology (CMALT).

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Clare Killen

Clare has 24 years of experience in supporting providers from the higher and further education skills sectors with various aspects of staff development, including in effective use of digital technologies to support educational practices and ambitions. She has led teams delivering national initiatives and provided consultancy services focusing on: whole organisation improvements, transformational change, curriculum design and improving professional practice through peer coaching. Clare has authored several guides for Jisc on topics such as student-staff partnerships, emerging digital practices and digital capability development.

Clare joined Jisc in 2018 as Content curation manager for the Building digital capability and Digital experience insights services.

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