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Thriving in the 21st century: the report of
the LLiDA project (Learning Literacies for the
Digital Age): Provision in the UK

Learning literacy provision in UK HE and FE institutions

This section reports on the two major data collection exercises carried out as part of the LliDA project. In collecting institutional data and snapshots of practice, our intention was to gain insights into how 'digital literacies' are currently interpreted and supported in UK HE and FE. We actively sought contributions from central services staff across the range of services potentially involved, from specialist projects or centres, and from those in academic departments working to embed literacies into the curriculum. We expected this last group of people to be much harder to reach, and this proved to be the case. Also very difficult to identify were examples of informal learner-led practices. We were, however, optimistic of finding multi-disciplinary work taking place across these groups, for example where central services staff have taken a pro-active role in supporting curriculum interventions or in setting up mentoring schemes.

The format of this section is to present the method and summary findings for the two investigations, then to present more detailed findings from both under the headings: strategies; central services provision: support in the curriculum; learner-led support; and reflections.

4.1 Audit: Method

The audit process and guidance notes were developed after an initial review of the literature and issues likely to arise at institutional level. They were further refined through an intensive piloting at Glasgow Caledonian University, and through feedback and discussion at 3 workshops with potential auditors and interested staff. Institutional auditors were recruited from these workshops, from personal contacts and partner agencies.

We were not looking for a representative sample of UK HE and FE but to record the current state of play in colleges and universities where 'digital literacies' were already perceived as an issue or agenda. Once identified and briefed, auditors were given a copy of the final audit tool and guidance notes, and made aware of the support available to them via email and the project wiki. In practice auditors made little use of this support: the guidance notes seem to have been clear, though the audit process was often described as 'difficult' or 'challenging' at institutional level.

Auditors were paid for the equivalent of two days' work to collect the data from their institution, which they were advised to do through a combination of desk review of documentation and consultation with colleagues. A number ran focus groups to address specific areas of the audit, particularly the reflective questions in section 7. Confidentiality was assured to all auditors and audit institutions: those with examples of excellent practice to report were encouraged also to submit snapshots (see below) which are publicly available on the project wiki.

4.2 Audit: Summary findings

Fifteen institutions completed the full audit of which 2 were FE colleges. Of the 13 Universities, the mix of pre- and post-1992, and of Scottish and English institutions was reasonably representative. There were no Welsh institutions represented. Where responses from FE were significantly different from responses from HE they have been treated separately. The point was not to take a representative sample but to look in detail at how *a range of different* institutions are responding to the challenges outlined thus far in the report.

Of those carrying out the audit, 6 (40%) were staff in a subject department, and 9 (60%) worked in central services. 5 of the 6 subject staff were involved in a special digital literacies project, while only 4 of the services staff were so involved, suggesting that most of the subject staff had a personal interest in digital literacies outside of their day-to-day role, while services staff may have become involved out of personal or professional interest.

Comments in the audit notes and by email have indicated that the process of auditing has in itself contributed to strategic change:

- An immediate outcome from this audit is a request (from two faculties) to bring the tool to Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee for wider discussions.
- The audit has clearly woken up a number of people about the need to address the issues.
- I think we've really benefited from doing this, and it's helped us consolidate what's happening across the University
- Already the outputs of our internal audit are making changes to what we do and how we do it, so thank you for involving us in the project and giving us an impetus for change.

4.3 Snapshots: Method

The snapshot pro-forma and guidelines (available from project web site) were distributed widely through a variety of mailing lists (lis-infoliteracy, elesig, JISC programmes, HE Academy and subject centres, key agencies) with a request for 'best practice' in learning and digital literacies support. Those who emailed to check criteria for submission were generally encouraged to submit. Snapshots were quickly added to the project wiki to provide examples and encourage further submissions, and a second mailshot was carried out about a month after the first. A small number of projects known to the authors were also approached directly.

4.4 Snapshots: summary findings

We received examples from a range of contributors including academics, librarians, and educational developers, with a few from teams working across these disciplines. Some of the exemplars were the result of project funding but the majority were institutionally funded and represented established practice or new approaches within established services and courses.

There are currently 41 unique snapshots in the database (<http://www.caledonianacademy.net/spaces/LLiDA/index.php?n=Main.BestPracticeExamples>), highlighting provision for a variety of learners:

- school students (4)
- undergraduate students (31)
- postgraduate students (17)
- remote students (4)
- staff development (8)

It is worth noting that these tags/categories reflected the specific target group of the intervention/activity, and that many of these resources and activities could be appropriate and useful to other groups of learners. Seven of the snapshots were specifically focused on learner transitions.

Total number of snapshots 41			
Category	Number	Category	Number
Exemplar type		Technologies cited	
Policy or strategy	2	E-portfolio system	3
Central services provision	15	PDA's	1
Provision in curriculum – separate module	6	Reference Management systems	1
Provision in curriculum – in topic module	11	PLEs	1
Learner led provision	3	Podcasts	4
Literacy & competency testing	1	Video	6
Educational context		VLEs	12
Adult learners	6	Virtual worlds	1
Further Education	6	Searchable database	2

Higher education	34	Social software/web 2.0	6
Foundation degree	2	Wiki	4
Literacies addressed		Approaches to student support	
ICT literacies	19	Assessed	9
Information literacies	22	Competence testing	1
Academic literacies	22	Interviews	1
Employment skills	2	Online tutorials	9
Media literacies	1	Peer mentoring	5
Literacy frameworks	8	PDP	2
Subject discipline (where relevant)		Printed resources	3
Art & Design	2	Self Regulated Learning	4
Computer Science	1	Student induction	4
Environmental studies	1	Workshops	5
Health	5		
Humanities	2		
Landscape & Garden Design	1		
Management	1		
Mathematics	1		
Psychology	1		
Research skills	1		
Sciences	1		
Social Sciences	2		
Statistics	1		
Teaching	5		

Table 4.1: various categorisations of snapshots submitted

The spread across literacies was fairly even, though these figures hide some interesting variations:

- ICT literacies (19)
- Information literacies (22)
- Academic literacies (22)

Many snapshots supported more than one of these literacies: in fact good practice seems often to involve working at the interface between high-level terms, between competence frameworks, and between institutional roles. A very few contributors refer to frameworks but none had been implemented or integrated directly into practice, highlighting the trend for institutions to create bespoke frameworks that are right for their needs (NB this is almost certainly more available as a practise and value in HE than in FE). Oxford Brookes², LSE and Edinburgh are all good examples of this. The Oxford Brookes institutional strategy was mapped retrospectively to the Sconul 7 Pillars framework, and the ease with which this was done reinforces our impression that the framework – or the terms it uses - are already part of the discourse of staff working in this area.

Other literacies identified explicitly included

- Employment skills (2)
- Media Literacies (1)

It is worth noting that many of the exemplars in practice did support the use of different media, including two of the most radically embedded into their respective curricula (see discussion under 4.7

below). The term 'media literacies', and the idea of paying critical attention to media as supporting different social and communicative practices, are perhaps not in general currency. The exemplar that included this term explicitly was for a module entitled 'Media and Information Literacy Course Unit' within a Masters course in Digital Technologies, Communication and Education, a subject area in which 'media' is already a key locus of pedagogic effort and a central interpretive term.

Employability is also notable by its near absence from these snapshots, despite its prevalence in institutional strategies (see 4.5 below).

The terminology used in the snapshots is variable, reflecting that our methodology emphasised practical provision and directed contributors to use the terminology they were most familiar with. Nine of the snapshots used the terms '*digital literacies*' or '*digital literacy*', usually in the context of ICT skills, 11 mentioned communication skills and 9 mentioned critical skills or literacy. We are concerned to note from workshops that the language of literacy, even among those who identified most closely with our study, is still unfamiliar or very contested. It seems certain that we missed valuable work, particularly among practitioners in departments, whose professional role and language would not have exposed them to the terms we were using.

Where exemplars concerned activities within the curriculum, the subject heading tags show a very strong bias towards applied subjects (i.e. vocational/professional): health related (5) social care (2) and teaching/education (5), along with two others (garden design and management). Two other exemplars are allied with cross-disciplinary skills (statistics, research skills) rather than a specific discipline. The clear conclusion is that literacies are more prominently or more self-consciously addressed by teachers of applied subjects and applied skills, though again these may be the only practitioners with whom the terms of our invitation had any resonance.

The education exemplars in particular are concerned with ensuring that teachers are able to utilise the range of technologies available to them to support learning. There are also a significant number of snapshots that describe staff development interventions, particularly in the use of web 2.0 technologies. Other work (e.g. Sharpe et al., 2005) has highlighted the difficulty of bringing learners to the centre of attention in investigating e-learning practices., as was our intention here. However, there is increasing evidence that even digitally confident learners still look to their tutors for guidance on use of ICT to support their learning¹, and this understanding may be reflected in the number of interventions that focus support on tutors' skills.

One surprise to us was the number of interventions based around the virtual learning environment. It may be that this is simply the most effective means of reaching learners: recent research² does indicate that learners place great value on having one location from which they can access everything of relevance to their studies. However, we expected a much higher number of interventions based around e-portfolio systems (which we tried hard to distinguish from VLEs with an e-portfolio function) where learners have greater ownership of the processes involved. This imbalance may reflect a lack of depth in the embedding of literacies, with resources available but with no requirement on learners to diagnose their needs, reflect on their identities as learners, or integrate literacies into their learning goals.

The snapshots include a fairly wide range of interventions with online tutorials (8) and workshops (5) being the most significant. Seven snapshots included assessed activities whilst only two described competence testing or skills auditing as a first step in providing support. A few of the snapshots refer to online resources developed to support learners acting independently, but many focus on the value of tutors and other learners to support the development of literacies. In practice most resources, whether online or print-based, are designed for delivery in a supportive context whether that is based around workshops, one-to-one support, or embedded into programmes of study. Once again, though, PDP (2) is not widely used as a means of addressing literacy needs.

¹ This is one finding of the JISC Learners' Experiences of e-Learning programme: see <https://mw.brookes.ac.uk/display/JISCle2f/Beliefs+and+expectations> and <https://mw.brookes.ac.uk/display/JISCle2f/Course+level+practices>

² Also from the JISC LEX programme: see 'what learners value' at <https://mw.brookes.ac.uk/display/JISCle2f/Preferences>

4.5 Findings: Institutional strategy and policy

Eleven of the auditors described at least 4 institutional documents which made strategic statements about learning and digital literacies, 5 (33%) described 6 or more, the mode being 5. At the very least this indicates that the issue has widespread strategic significance. It may also indicate a lack of joined-up thinking.

Sixty separate institutional strategy documents were described to us by auditors. Of these, 19 were classified as learning and teaching strategies, some including faculty/school LTA strategies in the set of fully described strategies and others indicating that faculty/department LTA strategies also presented opportunities for literacy issues to be raised. Unsurprisingly, given directives from HEFCE and SHEFC, this can be seen as the institutional norm. Four documents were directed at course and module development teams or provided general curriculum/academic frameworks, and 5 further documents were classified as e-learning strategies, giving 28 of the total devoted directly to learning, teaching and assessment.

Four institutions had explicit information literacy or skills strategies, two of which also had an e-learning strategy.

Six strategies were classified as learner development, learning development, learner guidance or PDP.

Two strategies were concerned with 'quality' while 6 were whole-institution strategic plans, indicating that more than half of audited institutions were addressing learning and digital literacies at the highest level of institutional planning. However, strategy documents were particularly likely to be 'unclear' about the mechanisms for supporting literacies or embedding their support into programmes of study. Employability was mentioned frequently in these high-level strategies: one committed the university to supporting '*digital literacies in order to enhance employability*'. More typical was a commitment to '*the use of digital tools to solve the challenges inherent in mass higher education*' i.e. to solve institutional problems, rather than to help learners thrive in a digitally-enabled society and economy.

Six were classified as ICT or IS strategies, though this included 2 (information management, and information strategy) which took a broader approach to managing information across the institution. Only 2 of the 6 made reference to learners' ICT/digital skills. Of the 15 institutions audited, then, only 2 brought forward strategies which considered learners' skills in the context of ICT strategy and planning, despite our direction to auditors that they should consider ICT/IS strategies and look for ICT skills as a term.

The remaining strategies were concerned with a range of issues: retention, progression, transition, internationalism, employability (2), employer engagement, CPD and widening participation. These issues can all be seen as concerning the curriculum in specific aspects.

Within the 60 strategic documents we asked auditors which literacies were mentioned. We then analysed the raw text provided by auditors against our framework. Our scores are as follows:

Learning to learn	12
Academic literacies	27
Information literacies	11
Communication and collaboration skills	12
Media Literacy	2
ICT/digital literacies	15
Employability	25
Citizenship	4
Other terms	

Key skills/core skills	5
Numeracy	3
Disposition and potential	4
PDP (incl. in employability)	6
Subject specific skills (incl. in academic)	3
Lifelong learning (incl. in learning to learn)	6

Table 4.2: literacies addressed in strategic documents

Most strategies addressed several literacies from our framework (mean = 2.25) [NB factor analysis could determine whether there is any pattern to how these are grouped]. There is a lack of strategic concern with media literacy, either in the context of information literacy or as a separate issue, though 'communication' is a relatively widely used term which embraces some of the same capabilities. Employability is widely referenced as a concept but without any coherent terminology or clear link to more specific literacies from our framework.

Terms we had difficulty accommodating were *key skills/core skills*, which in practice included *numeracy* and *read/write literacy*, defined as 'basic skills' in the Leitch Review (Leitch, 2006). *Disposition and potential* covers a small number of items which would have been difficult to accommodate within a practices framework, e.g. *honesty, reliability*, though we note that a recent CBI survey of employers' ideal graduate attributes produced more dispositional terms than skills or competences (CBI/EdExcel, 2008).

We undertook analysis of *who* the strategies identified as responsible for supporting literacies, and of *how* they saw such support being provided.

Students (implied in statements about shared responsibility)	1
Academic staff in depts	23
Academic leaders (Deans, Heads of School/Faculty etc)	5
Module leaders	1
(Guidance) tutors	3
Teaching fellows	1
Faculty total	33
Learning/study/skills support	14
Library	9
Subject librarians	4
Educational development/Academic practice	5
e-learning	5
Careers	1
Computing services	1
Student Services	2
Learning technologists	3
Central services total	44
Specialist support centres (writing, maths)	1
Student Union	1
Specialist projects (internal)	1
Externally funded projects (CETLs)	4

Employers	1
Community organisations	11
Outreach staff	1

Table 4.3: Who is responsible for developing literacies?

Organisational:	
New framework(s) or requirements in course/module documentation	3
Review induction process	2
Support transition from schools and partner colleges	1
New partnerships within institution	3
Identify and embed institutional best practice	1
Technical:	
Use VLE to integrate support	4
Use of web 2.0 techs	3
Use of mobile techs	1
Use of eportfolios	2
Central services staff:	
Workshops	14
Online resources	14
Printed resources	7
Induction activities	5
Drop-in sessions	5
One to one sessions	5
Learning and teaching materials	2
Help-desk	1
Summer schools	1
One-off sessions for programmes	1
Academic staff:	
Staff development	10
Curriculum innovation	3
Enhance scholarship (of learning and teaching)	2
Programmes of study:	
Embed specific literacies	10
Work based/vocational courses	4
Skills modules	3
Embed PDP	1
Students:	
Engage in PDP	12
Undertake/record work experience	2
Undertake/record volunteering	1
Engage with consultations about curriculum ('student voice')	2
Engage with feedback/assessment	3

Students (new modes of support, unspecified responsibility):	
Diagnose learning needs/preferences	3
Diagnose skills requirements	1
Regular skills review	1
Support for independent and collaborative working	3
Support for remote and distributed learners	3
Support for exams	1
Pastoral support	1
Referral to other agencies	1

Table 4.4: How will literacy development be supported?

Strategies apportioned responsibility for students' developing literacies fairly evenly between academic staff and central services. Students themselves were scarcely mentioned as having responsibility in this area, though appear more clearly as actors when the means of intervention are considered. There was a surprisingly strong showing for CETLs, at the four Universities where these were already involved in literacy work (our sample possibly skewed towards these?), and for community organisations of various kinds. Although citizenship is far less prominent than employability in the literacies to be developed, then, community groups are far more prominent than employers among the resources available for supporting students' emerging literacies.

As means of enhancing literacy development, central services staff were most likely to be called upon to develop workshops and online materials for students: academic staff were most likely to be called upon to develop their own skills. In five strategies, the terms *scholarship* (of teaching) or (curriculum) *innovation* were used to lend weight and credibility to this expectation. It can be assumed that course teams i.e. (typically) both central services staff and academic staff would be involved in the embedding of literacies into programmes of study. In the FE colleges the focus was more strongly on diagnosis and support of individual learners' skills.

Students were rarely addressed as responsible actors in these strategies and yet many of the activities mandated would not make sense, or be successful, without active student engagement: provision for PDP and recording of work/voluntary experience; student representation on curriculum bodies; diagnosis, review and feedback on skills development. Given comments about the unpopularity of some literacy approaches, student engagement can be seen as a missing factor in strategic thinking about this issue. It is also striking how many strategies expect students to undertake PDP in relation to the rather small number of practical examples we received in this area.

Further analysis of these strategies was difficult as the language used was idiosyncratic and often very general. Information strategies tended to be most clearly focused on a finite set of learner skills. Terminology showed the influence of the SCONUL 7 pillars of information literacy, though this framework was referenced only once, and staff responsible always included library / learning resources, though often with implicit or explicit involvement of academic staff. The strategies broadly concerned with learning and teaching tended also to focus on the skills and capabilities of learners, but ranged much more widely in the terminology used to describe these and in the people and interventions seen as appropriate in supporting them.

Qualitative analysis of snapshots

Two snapshots related to institutional strategies which were integrating the development of students' digital and learning literacies at a high level. These - from Glasgow Caledonian University and Oxford Brookes University – are well worth reading in detail.

Common features of both strategies are:

- institution-wide changes to policy, clearly linked to main institutional drivers and priorities

- actions cascaded through a range of institutional strategies e.g. quality, ICT, and practices, e.g. course documentation
- an incremental approach, spearheaded by pilot projects/initiatives, some with external funding
- collaboration between central services and academic staff, principally around...
- course development and review, involving multi-disciplinary development teams, with intensive resourcing
- large central unit (e-learning PLUS academic development) driving policy forward: in both cases with substantial national profile and hybrid teaching/development/research agenda
- ongoing research, evaluation and evidence-gathering about students' experiences with technology and learning
- commitment to understanding the learning experience in a holistic way: 'learning takes place in a technology-rich world'
- building on previous work, treating transformation as a long-term project
- moving people out of their silos, for example by creating hybrid and/or 'roving' roles

Key terms from the Gcal <i>i-learn</i> framework	Key terms from OxBrookes' <i>Mapping Graduate Attributes for a Digital Age</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Critical understanding * Informed by current developments in the subject * An awareness of the provisional nature of knowledge, how knowledge is created, advanced and renewed, and the excitement of developing knowledge. * The ability to identify and analyse problems and issues and to formulate, evaluate and apply evidence based solutions and arguments * An ability to apply a systematic and critical assessment of complex problems and issues * An ability to deploy techniques of analysis and enquiry * Familiarity with appropriate techniques and skills, including presentation and communication skills * Originality and creativity in formulating, evaluating and applying evidence-based solutions and arguments * An understanding of the need for a high level of ethical, social, cultural, environmental and wider professional conduct. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * self-regulating citizens in a globally connected society, * able to handle multiple, diverse information sources and media, * proficiently mediating their interactions with social and professional groups using an ever-changing and expanding range of technologies and * able confidently to use digital technologies to reflect on, record and manage their lifelong learning.

Table 4.5 Key terms from institutional frameworks

4.6 Findings: Central services

Thirteen auditors described at least four central service teams with responsibilities for learning and digital literacies: seven described at least six. As with strategies, this may indicate the breadth of concern with literacies, and/or a fragmentary approach to implementation. In all, 71 different central service teams were described to us across the 15 institutions. Four were excluded from the following analysis on the grounds that they provided support solely to academic staff (though more on this later). Many supported several high-level literacies, and this overlap is reflected in the raw score below.

Academic practice	15
Learning to learn	12
Information literacy	20
Media literacy	1
Communication skills	2
ICT	20

Employability	11
Citizenship	4
Access	8
English	2
Maths	1

Table 4.6: Literacies supported by central services

We have added a new category of access which included widening participation and outreach work (e.g. 'Get Ready for University Study') along with disability support. We found eight examples, five in combination with another high level literacy term. English and Maths might be included under the same umbrella. These are highly learner-centred services, designed to help individuals overcome barriers to study. We could therefore tentatively bracket them with the 'learning to learn' services described below.

Four included the term 'digital literacies' in the text describing service function, and of these we analysed 2 as supporting 'information literacies' and two as supporting 'information/ICT' in combination.

Unlike the strategies section, auditors had little difficulty identifying and expressing which literacies were supported by which services. One would expect a better understanding of and focus on practical needs among staff directly involved in provision, but there is the potential for the clearer differentiation of roles, functions and terminology at services level to get in the way of joined up thinking.

'learning support' and 'academic practice'

We identified 15 services that were providing academic practice support, and 12 that were providing 'learning' support. Only one service did we struggle to differentiate, as it was described simply as providing the 'whole range of academic/learning literacies'. Therefore either a 'real' differentiation exists, or there is a divergence of terminology which mirrors our analytical framework. (We have not yet analysed whether the academic/learning divide falls along pre-1992/post-1992 lines.)

Some support for a real world differentiation of functions is given in the data, so for example 'learning support' is more likely to be provided through workshops and IAG, and much less likely to be provided in collaboration with academics through input to specific modules or courses. It is also slightly more likely to be provided by email or telephone (learner-centred technologies?) and less likely to be provided at drop-in sessions.

Learning support is also more likely than academic practice to be supported by services with a hybrid remit, so for example 4 of the 12 were providing learning support in conjunction with ICT and two in conjunction with employability. Where academic practice is supported in hybrid contexts, there is much less clarity about its affiliation: 2 for information literacies, 1 each for access and communication, and one very generalised service supporting academic practices (to include) access, information and ICT capabilities. While the sample size is small, it gives some support to the existence of two discrete discourses around learning literacy, and two different models for supporting learners:

Learning support	Academic practice
<p>Summary: student centred, focused on students' own practices (at best – can also focus on students' individual needs or deficits).</p> <p>Rationale: learners need practical strategies for fitting learning into their lives</p> <p>Recognises learners have existing practices and other commitments: learning as lifepath and personal development</p>	<p>Summary: often subject centred, typified by work in collaboration with academics, focused on practices of the university and its component disciplines e.g. research skills, methods, academic writing.</p> <p>Rationale: learners need explicit guidance on what is expected of them in academic context(s)</p> <p>Recognises that the practices of the academy, including its information and communication practices, can be challenging: learning as apprenticeship</p>

Example from audit: 'General help and guidance with learning issues (often underlying emotional issues)'	Example from audit: 'Research skills for referencing, sourcing and evaluating literature/materials for subject discipline work'
More likely to be supported through: Workshops Information, advice and guidance Telephone/email (learner-owned technologies?)	More likely to be supported through Collaboration with academics on modules and programmes Drop-in support
Likely to be hybridised with: employability, ICT	Less likely to be hybridised: no clear pattern
Asks: 'who is this learner and what are their personal barriers to learning more effectively'?	Asks: how can academic practises be made clearer and more accessible to learners?

Table 4.7 A comparison of 'learning support' and 'academic practice'

ICT and information literacy

We found 20 instances of each term – showing that in at least some institutions there is more than one service supporting information literacy, and more than one service supporting ICT – but 8 instances of overlap i.e. information literacies and ICT skills being supported by a common service. Information literacy was more likely to be associated with academic practice, and ICT with learning to learn (significance not tested). All services supporting information literacy in isolation were based in the library, while all services supporting ICT in isolation were ICT/IT services, central or devolved. Where the two were supported in tandem, the service titles reveal some interesting relationships and trajectories:

Bringing ICT/info services together to provide more joined-up *support to learners* (4)

- Learner Support Centre
- Customer services
- Learning Support Services (Library-based)
- Learning Development

Understanding '*information*' in a more joined-up way (3)

- Information & Research Development
- Learning Information Services
- Information Services (Computing/ Learning Technologies)

e-learning or *learning technology* as unifying concept (2)

- Centre for Learning Technology (CLT)
- Information Services (Computing/Learning technologies) (again)

This last trajectory is also supported by the observation that the four e-learning or LT services cited in the study all supported a hybrid info/ICT or learning/ICT agenda.

Employability and citizenship

There were 12 services described as supporting employability, of which 2 also served access requirements, 2 supported learning generally, and 1 supported ICT skills. In four instances 'citizenship' skills were also supported (but see below): there were no examples of citizenship being supported separately from employability. In most cases, employability was a secondary term to some other term. In all three cases where employability was supported in isolation, the service was described as careers. The number of instances of citizenship were skewed by three entries from one institution (indeed from one school of the one institution) and the one other instance occurred in a 'guidance and support' service offering a unique blend of 'citizenship, self-employment, and enterprise skills, finance, SAAS and UCAS training', suggesting that the term is in limited use.

Media and Communications Literacy

The very low level of support for media or communications literacies is borne out by analysis of the snapshots (see next section). The term 'communication' appears 6 times overall in the text of responses about central services, three times in the context of a concern with employability – including the one time 'communication skills' are given as a separate category – and three times in

the context of academic practice, i.e. scholarly or academic communication. It also appears, of course, in the 'C' of 'ICT'. It may be that the idea of communication is so embedded in these other literacies that it is of limited value to insist on it as a separate area of development. The same may be true of 'collaboration', completely absent as a term from this list, despite the number of strategic statements (12) which expressed a commitment to learners' communication/collaboration skills.

Media literacies as a term would appear to have an even more limited and specialist meaning. It appears once, where it is used to mean '*Use of equipment and facilities [cameras, audio and video editing facilities] for all students and those specific to departments such as creative media*'. The term 'critical' appears twice, in 'critical thinking' (general academic literacy component) and 'critical understanding' (of information). It is difficult to interpret either use as implying the critical approach to media production practice that is usually meant by the term 'media literacies'. We conclude that this is a discourse that has not entered into service provision, and/or that there is a gap in provision such that only learners on highly specialised media courses receive support in understanding issues surrounding critical 'reading' of media texts, and creative production.

Modes of provision and support – overall

The overall modes of literacy support are listed in descending order of frequency: with the exception of those issues already explored there were no immediately apparent differences across the different literacy types, and few surprises.

Information, advice and guidance	52
Online resources	48
Workshop(s)	48
Staff development (support for staff supporting students)	43
Email or telephone support	41
Induction session(s)	36
Drop-in services	36
One-to-one tutorials	33
(Input to) specialist module(s)	31
Assessment/diagnostic service	24
Other	20

Table 4.8: How central services staff support learning literacy development

The 'other' modes of provision included:

- Printed resources (x5) - we had omitted this essential and widespread form of self-study from our list
- (Small) group briefings (4, all from one institution) – perhaps something between a drop-in service and a workshop, with support tailored to the needs of a (self selecting?) group.
- Specific support for users identified as having disabilities (x2)
- Peer mentoring (x2): student mentors who work with new and less experienced students to support their literacies development.
- Virtual/online/web resources – included in our list but augmented with several more specific examples: resource sharing and 'best practice sites' (we need to clarify that these were aimed at learners and not staff!), online chat, model Cvs and application forms, web pages, digital learning objects, self study materials, wiki's, blogs, podcasts. Also a number of specialised portals and web sites were cited e.g. 'Information literacy online resource – this is designed to help students to locate, access and evaluate information' 'A web portal gives links to opportunities within the university to develop skills.'
- Access/outreach/induction – Recruitment and induction are proving key points in the learning lifecycle for literacy interventions. Examples included:

- *mentoring schemes of current students visiting their past college to raise aspirations of college based students*
- *an intensive 7-week Preparation for Higher Education programme*
- *pre-orientation courses*
- *All first years are required to undertake a key skills diagnostic test during induction week. They are then advised as to which sessions might be useful in supporting their literacy/numeracy key skill development*
- Personal/wellbeing service – one example of a 'wellbeing service' integrating counselling support with support for learning and study skills

Support for academic staff in departments is also clearly a significant part of these services' work. In addition to the 31 services providing input to specialist modules, auditors used the 'other' category to tell us about consultancy to departments, input to curriculum design and teaching, collaborations with teaching teams, and staff development. This focus on support for staff suggests it is seen as prerequisite for effective support of student literacies, particularly in taught programmes, as dealt with in the following sub-section.

Qualitative analysis of snapshots

Of the 15 examples submitted in the 'Central services' category, 9 concerned information literacy, 1 info/ICT, 1 numeracy, 2 academic skills (same university), and 2 general learning skills (same university). The information literacy examples help to confirm that the discourse and component skill-sets for information literacies are well established, detailed, sensitive to context, and widely recognised. Staff are confident enough to experiment with different forms of provision and generally have good communication with academic staff. The snapshots confirm feedback from the audit that practice in the area of information literacy support is well established and well regarded.

Four themes emerged from these examples:

Modular provision: 'bite-sized', 'pocket-sized' resources on different aspects of information literacy are non-intimidating to students, and can be studied flexibly as required. They are also highly flexible and repurposable by different staff and in different teaching/learning contexts (Edinburgh, Napier, Leeds Met)

Multiple media, including e.g. podcasts, videos and interactive tutorials (Kingston College) to suit different learners, and playing to the different strengths of print and screen delivery (Leeds Met)

Outreach: whether into faculties (City of Bristol College, Coventry) or into the wider community (Bedfordshire), information specialists need to act as ambassadors, target local needs, and be prepared to tailor their offering to different demands. Being on the spot really helps, as do student ambassadors

Integrated: Cornwall College outlined some key lessons from delivering a fully integrated ICT and learning skills programme: Regular and mandatory tutorials, offered in a medium convenient to the learner; small study groups with regular face to face meetings for motivation and support.

In this category, the LSE example showed central services staff sharing expertise with 'mixed ability' academic staff and PhD students, defining 'digital literacy' as proficiency in finding and using information using a variety of tools and services including web 2.0 applications.. This approach recognises that the relevant expertise is unevenly distributed in the academic population, and offers an interesting counterpart to the peer-mentoring approach taken by several of the learner-led exemplars.

No snapshots of practice were concerned with employability, which suggests either that our communications failed to reach the departments most closely associated with this area (careers), and/or that there is a problem in joining up institutional strategies with practical interventions to support learners.

4.7 Findings: Support for literacies in courses and curricula

Developing literate curricula

From the audit, typical practice for course review, (re)validation and approval³ offers several opportunities for literacies to be considered:

- Multi-role teams involved in review: individuals likely to have different expertise in subject-specific and generic literacies
- A pro-forma for each stage of the development process and review process, which typically includes question(s) about generic skills and attributes
- approval by internal (school/faculty/dept) committee and by a higher committee or body of the institution e.g. quality, academic standards

Staff involved in the development and validation process usually include:

- Programme/module leader
- Other teaching staff
- Subject librarian
- Learning/teaching expert
- One member of academic staff from another faculty and
- One external member

Also sometimes included:

- employers, professional bodies (consultative role) (4)
- student reps (3)
- guidance and support staff (3)
- e-learning/technology staff (3)
- teaching fellows (2)
- senior admin staff (registry, academic affairs, programmes manager)
- core skills staff

We collected the following good practice indicators from our audit responses:

- specific skills, such as library and information skills, are typically being taught at the stage in a course when students need to use them
- earlier input [i.e. before mandatory approval] into curriculum design from outside the department is often sought by course teams on an ad hoc basis and often where good individual relations exist between academic staff and central services
- The Guidance and Support Manager advises on the guidance and support implications for the programme.... the Core Skills staff advise on the core skills for the programme.

However, problems were also identified:

- *the espoused view is a course team consisting of subject specialists plus some pedagogic input and instructional design. In use however is ... largely down to module leader.*
- *Typical feedback on a module design is "Yes". Just a single word, so no real engagement with the process.*
- *Can encourage tick-box approach though the 'central services [staff on course teams] try to get academics to... not treat it as tick-box exercise'*
- *Getting literacies and skills into programme documentation is only the first step to embedding them in learning, teaching and assessment*

³ The JISC Covarm project has produced a technical process model of a typical (canonical) course validation process: see http://www.jisc.org.uk/media/documents/programmes/elearningframework/covarm_final_report_v1.pdf

Opportunities and challenges at the level of individual programmes are explored in more detail in relation to the exemplars of practice (below).

Asked what learning skills and literacies needed to be considered by course teams at their institution, the auditors revealed an extraordinary diversity of practice. Several indicated that no skills or literacies were required, though one thought this might actually be an incentive to interesting discussions at module level. Others were cynical about the degree to which mandated requirements were discussed in any depth (see 'tick-box exercise' above).

Among those institutions that did lay down requirements (typically via the relevant pro-forma), there was almost no consensus as to what should be mandated, aside from the relative prominence of employability (1 in 3). The skills mentioned were:

Scholarship study skills (2) research skills (2) independent learning/lifelong learning (3)
writing (2) communication (2) reading
Numeracy core skills problem solving working with others creative thinking critical and analytical skills
IT skills (3) information literacies (2) skills for 'blended learning' or 'e-learning' (2)
sustainable development citizenship
subject specific skills (2)

Table 4.9 Skills and literacies required to be considered during course/module development

Prominent features of this list from the perspective of our study are:

- diversity – only employability mandated for consideration in more than 3 institutions
- continued influence of govt key skills agenda on the terms and language in use

A complete re-modularisation process was the driver for change at one institution: *[As part of the revalidation process] module descriptors ... had to clearly articulate how the module would embed the development of specific learning skills and literacies... Similarly, programme documentation (e.g. definitive course document, programme specification; validation documents) must clearly articulate the learning skills and literacies that are relevant to the design and content of the programme, and must also map them to specific modules within the programme.*

Another university had adopted the SEEC level descriptors and QCA key skills framework (since 2002) with which every programme and module must comply. This can be compared with the two institutional strategies described above, where frameworks were developed specifically to meet the specific mission, vision and culture of the institution.

In most cases, however, responsibility was devolved much more locally to departments. Subject benchmark statements and professional or statutory body requirements were heavily relied on in several institutions, while in others literacy issues were addressed around assessment requirements *'which are usually based on past practices'*: transferable skills were *'only included in course documentation where they are explicitly assessed'*. Three mentioned 'minimum' VLE or MLE requirements as having an impact on how courses are described: a case of standardisation of practice coming about through use of an ICT-based system to support delivery.

Approaches to provision in the curriculum

In practice there appear to be 3 broad approaches to literacy provision in the curriculum:

1. Institution-wide or curriculum-wide programme (usually portfolio-based) covering e.g. study skills and research skills (FE), 'information literacy, referencing, written communication, and research and evaluation skills' (HE) with relevant skills being practised within modules. Portfolio typically not assessed – though elements of it may be used for assessment in participating modules – but seen as part of employability agenda for graduates. Benefits from - and can be driver for - joined-up thinking across the institution.
2. Programme-specific modules, or module components, addressing e.g. core/key skills, subject-specific skills, study skills, research methods, employability, personal and professional development. Within a modular programme, tailored components and even individualised pathways can be built around these elements. Delivery is typically by central services staff, so assessment and motivation can be issues: effective tailoring to the curriculum depends on good relationships with academic staff.
3. Literacy provision fully integrated into modules and/or programmes of study. Usually assessed, e.g. by portfolio or simply by incorporating literacies into assessment criteria for module assignments. Depends on highly engaged and committed academic staff, prepared to rethink their own practice around changing literacy requirements. Easier to bring off in professional/vocational programmes that are already competence-based.

There is not enough information in the audit data to assess the pros and cons of the different approaches, and nor are institutions necessarily choosing one approach over another on a rational basis. Some auditors noted that different schools were pulling in different directions, making it *'difficult for people to know what's going on'*.

These different approaches do place different requirements on central services staff, whose attention needs to be balanced between:

- direct generic provision (to all students on a referral or self-referral basis)
- direct provision within programme contexts (may be largely generic or adapted in consultation with academic staff)
- supporting provision in modules and programmes (providing generic expertise to a subject-specific learning experience)
- building capacity of academic staff to support literacies in their own teaching and tutorial work

They also entail different approaches by academic staff. In one institution, departments develop skills-based modules in areas in which they have particular expertise, then make them available across the institution:

The School of Computing offers an option Introduction to the Web that has a strong focus on developing digital literacy skills including basic web page design, evaluating content credibility, and using web 2.0 tools including social networking. This specific module is a one of a suite of co-curricular modules that can be taken by students across the University. Other co-curricular modules offered from across a range of Faculties and Schools include Creativity, Innovation and Enterprise, Effective Learning & Career Development, and Information, Communication and Society.

At another, 'contextualised technology skills' are taught by course tutors with the support of specialists, ensuring staff and students alike build their confidence: *'Course Tutors introduce learners to the VLE at the start of their course and introduce them to Personal Learning Plans, Induction materials, and use of Blogs, Wikis, Voicethread, Bebo, Facebook, Youtube'*.

Asked about delivery and assessment of learning literacies in the curriculum, 3 out of 14 respondents knew of instances where central services staff were involved on an equal or nearly equal footing with subject-specialist staff, though not involved in assessment. In the remaining cases their role was supportive.

Asked about whether academic staff had support to integrate literacies effectively, the overwhelming answer was 'yes, in principle'. This came through input to certificated learning and teaching programmes, workshops, e-materials, exemplars of good practice, mentoring, drop-in sessions, briefings and consultancy to curriculum teams, and peer support. Where more detail was given, the staff development often had an ICT tools focus, suggesting the trojan mouse strategy is alive and well.

Provisos and problems included:

- *but do they know about it?* (all provision for staff except PGCerts tends to be voluntary)
- not clear who identifies and articulates need
- cultural issues (clearly identified by one respondent as differences of knowledge, vocabulary, approach, and institutional status between academic and central services staff)
- unfamiliarity of learning development and learning literacies, as concepts and practices
- (related) issues of institutional power and recognition: *'some colleagues who are still locked into the "possession of knowledge as power" syndrome and won't share toys or know-how'*
- time-poor staff
- perception that *'it's not their job to get [learners] ready for learning – should come with learning skills'*

Our questions about different approaches to delivery did not produce any clear account of benefits but highlighted issues such as:

- Assessment – when, how, and by whom are literacies assessed? What weight is attached to them?
- Compulsory vs elective modules – some evidence that compulsory skills modules are disliked by learners and can create problems of retention and motivation
- Cohort-based provision, or support for learners as/when they need it?
- Timing – some evidence that front-loading skills and literacies is less effective than introducing and revisiting them over a course of study
- Going native: Subject librarians are now commonplace, and faculty/school based e-learning advisors and study skills advisers are becoming more so. Do central services staff need to acquire subject specialism, and do academic staff need to be seconded to build capacity for literacy development in their 'home' context?
- New models? Access, foundation and work-based learning programmes were particularly likely to be cited as examples of good practice in embedding skills for learning, e.g.: *The Access to HE course has 90 minutes/week study skills, tutorial and IT (each). [This year we plan to] embed digital literacies such as online research and collaborative learning using Web 2.0 technologies as part of a revised course. Could these models become catalysts for a broader awareness and understanding of literacy issues?*
- Feedback – not one auditor mentioned feedback to students, or general assessment, as mechanisms for supporting literacy development, suggesting that the model of provision within courses (unlike student-centred services) may be somewhat instructivist. Academic staff may be used to giving feedback around course content, but not around an individual learning development agenda.
- Academic staff engagement, commitment and resources: rethinking programmes of study around the competences learners need, particularly where those competences are changing (e.g. in response to new digital opportunities) places large demands on academic staff. The rewards need to be clear: a discourse of scholarship, innovation and reflective practice may be more productive than a skills and literacies agenda.

Finally we asked auditors why departments were successful/motivated, or unsuccessful and unmotivated, in relation to embedding literacies into the curriculum.

Opportunities and motivators	Risks and disincentives
<p>Institutional initiatives and commitments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retention Employability transferable skills widening access use of ICT in the curriculum 'flexibility' in the curriculum learning experience <p>External bodies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standards set by professional bodies requirement for evidence-based practice in the professions <p>Culture/attitudes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> recognition of the changing way in which knowledge is being created and shared, and in how people are communicating, socialising and learning scholarship of teaching (well recognised MA course in L&T) changing attitudes <p>Staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> graduates of PCCert L&T courses changing attitudes in departments champions in depts, especially academic leaders/directors of study a genuine and widely held view that it is the responsibility of subject groups as part of their academic teaching right mix of new and experienced staff (in a unit or dept) staff with a personal interest in literacies, pedagogy, new technologies support from teaching fellows <p>Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> low scores for teaching quality in NSS high failure rates higher expectations e.g. as a result of fees students with an obvious need for literacies to be included in their programmes challenging or demotivated students larger numbers of international students/disabled students/direct entry students with explicit skills requirements needing to open up (postgraduate) market need to help students find good work/life/study balance 	<p>Institutional practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced contact time means less time for practise and coaching <p>External bodies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualification Authorities requirements have prevented integration of learning literacies into some areas <p>Culture/attitudes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> General discipline knowledge prioritised over skills/literacies inertia, desire to maintain comfort zone distrust of staff from outside dept lack of respect for staff from central services <p>Staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time and resource pressures Student numbers Perception that students should not be admitted until/unless they have certain skills Perception that students already have these skills Study skills seen as low status Lack of confidence in own capabilities (e.g. ICT in HE and general literacy in FE) Unaware of support available to them <p>Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dislike of skills-based modules Unaware of support available

Table 4.10 Opportunities and barriers to embedding literacies into the curriculum

Qualitative review of snapshot data

The snapshots of literacy practice in curriculum contexts were more varied than those provided by central services staff. Only 3 dealt with information literacies, and these confirmed findings above, e.g. the need for continued embedding and revision throughout the programme (Bedfordshire), and the importance of assessment. Motivation of students was much higher at Edge Hill, for example, where timetabling of literacy sessions and assessment of literacy tasks helped students to see them as 'a

key part of the curriculum'. Relying on students to self-assess their own information literacy requirements is risky: *'It was a little depressing to discover that many students even at level 2 are still relying on Google for their information and that many of them do not see the relevance of information literacy to their studies.'* (Bedfordshire) Research confirms that students are complacent about their own information skills, and that this is one area where their confidence is usually misplaced.

The remaining snapshots cover some interesting literacies and hybrids:

- Learning to learn /ICT 2 (1 PLE/PDP, 1 blogs)
- Academic practice 3 (1 international)
- Acad/ICT 1 (wiki)
- Acad/info 1 (referencing)
- Media/information 1
- Communication skills 1
- Digital literacies (teachers' professional development, in both cases quite ICT focused) 2
- Digital/media 2 (both fully embedded)

We did not find many type 1 (portfolio building) examples of embedded provision, though the Leicester Personal Learning Environment fell into this category and is interesting for being based in a scientific curriculum.

Most of the examples fell into the second category of embedding, i.e. central services provision around specific skills/literacies being added into existing programmes, usually with some tailoring to context.

Those that fell into the third category (rethinking of programmes of study) were in fact of two slightly different types.

(3.1) digital literacies provision represented a move towards the 'digital' within a programme already strongly based around professional competences (e.g.).

(3.2) the underpinning academic knowledge and knowledge practices being rethought in the context of new digital opportunities (though in practice there was a fairly direct link between programme content and professional practice in all of these cases as well).

We are particularly interested in this third type of embedding, not only because it seems to be the most challenging but because it represents the most radical impact on the curriculum and the practice of learners and academic staff. So we have looked at these examples in particular detail.

Oxford Brookes' 'Communicating Architectural Understanding in Video' describes how their use of digital video became *'essential to students synthesising their understanding of a building and conveying the sense of a building in 3D'*. The affordances of the video medium in relation to the conceptual challenges of the subject were clearly grasped by the tutor, and in the revised module the digital tools, the knowledge medium (video) and the conceptual task were fully integrated from induction through to assessment. Students were able to see the value of the digital artefacts they had produced in terms of their professional portfolios, as the use of video also reflected a shift in professional practice.

At Warwick, Theatre Studies students explored different theatrical spaces through the medium of second life. 'Virtual presence and embodiment are digital literacies' also shows commitment to rethinking curriculum knowledge in terms of broader changes in the media landscape. In this case, however, students' engagement with the 'new' medium was less extensive, and the medium itself was more tenuously linked with their final professional practice. Perhaps because of this, students spent most of their time engaged in 'playful' activities as they became accustomed to the affordances of SL itself, rather than addressing the questions they had been posed. Proficiency and confidence in the medium were explicit learning outcomes here, but the snapshot highlights several dangers: tutors cannot assume that students will arrive with virtual skills, or will be able to transfer such skills from leisure environments to academic environments, or will have a critical enough understanding of different environments to appreciate their different affordances for sense-making.

'Ducktatives' at Writtle College (also categorised as learner-led) was a learning experience on several levels. A collaboration between a landscape design tutor and a new media designer, who

clearly learned much from each others' design practices, it involved students of landscape design engaging with school children to develop a shared understanding of a playground site. Digital technologies in the form of GPS and PDAs were used, but only as part of a game that the students devised to help children express their ideas and engage with the design process. Students' proficient use of the technologies were a prerequisite but the task focused on their creativity, client-facing communication skills and problem-solving capabilities.

All three of these examples involve disciplines of physical space, and begin from an awareness that the meanings of physical spaces are changing as the 'real' and 'virtual' intersect. The implications of this awareness are so radical that the arising curriculum and learning activities are also radically changed: digital technologies become embedded aspects of the learning context, content and medium.

Further lessons about embedding came from the TVU example: 'We get it wrong: this helps us fix it'. The snapshot describes a structured approach to the development of advanced academic skills at years 3 /4 (UG), which includes:

- *'students being supported in recognising they are becoming members of an academic community with expectations of them'.*
- Taught sessions on critical skills, with intensive tutor and peer support
- A follow-up with practical tasks in the context of students' core discipline. *'Previous findings indicated that while students understood these critical skills at the time of explanation, they faced challenges in subsequent independent applications.'*
- Use of self-study materials (RLOs [Re-usable Learning Objects]) during the practice phase, these materials being carefully structured at a small level of granularity, so they can easily be incorporated into the personal development process.

Several snapshots not included in this category in fact represent the first type of 'embedding' we identified, i.e. a whole-institution approach. Bradford ('DevelopMe!') and Hertfordshire ('University Rocks!') engage students in thinking about their learning skills from the outset of their studies – in the case of Bradford before they have even arrived on campus. As the exclamation marks underline (!), both have focused on motivating and engaging students first, and on specific skills only once students are involved in the self-assessment process and excited about the opportunities of study. Key lessons include:

- use young staff and student mentors to engage new students
- keep it relevant to students' real lives
- use technologies that will be familiar from students' leisure use of digital networks
- allow learners to identify their own concerns and expectations
- embed the learners' voice into every aspect of literacy provision – keep listening to what learners expect, fear, hope and need from their experience of learning

4.8 Findings: Personal and peer support for learning literacies

PDP

Asked about support for learners' personal literacy development, all but one respondent interpreted this in terms of PDP. In FE this was structured around Individual Learning Plans while in HE the e-portfolio system was typically the focus. In many universities the ICT system was the only institution-level provision, with learner support being completely devolved to course or department level.

Good practice in supporting PDP included:

- Introduced at induction and forming a core element of the induction process
- (FE particularly strong on) initial skills assessment or self-assessment
- Linked to personal tutorials (i.e. tutors make active use of the e-portfolio system)
- Involvement of careers and linked to CV building and employability (again FE particularly strong)
- Integrated into courses/modules (highly variable in practice) e.g. through
 - learning contracts
 - tailored modules or sessions on personal/professional development
 - reflective diaries, logs, videos

Problems that can arise:

- Unpopular with students (several mentions: 'hated' in one case)
- Variable expertise and commitment in schools and departments – all departments cited as committed to PDP were vocational/professional (health, business, education)
- Where tutorial model is strong, skills and time resources of individual staff members can be an issue (though most auditors were extremely positive about this aspect of support)

Delivery of PDP often involves central services staff either as additional resources for learners to access at need, or to help deliver sessions: academic (learning) support and careers staff are most likely to be drawn upon. Most institutions also offer tutorial support, via subject tutors (typical in HE) or personal development and guidance tutors (typical in FE). Where this relationship works well, learners' needs can be assessed and addressed in a holistic way: *'beneath the formal processes (which are often unpopular), there is a rich level of support from individual tutors which is often where the transformative stuff happens'*. At the one institution where PDP was not a formal process, this was because the tutorial system has a very strong tradition, and is intensively resourced through top-up fees: *'tutors are closely involved in the progress of each of their undergraduates throughout the whole of their period [of study], and support and foster their intellectual and personal development'*

Student mentors were mentioned by only one audit institution as a resource to support learners' reflection and planning. There were also vanishingly few examples in practice (see snapshots review below) of PDP processes being effectively linked in with curriculum processes, such that teaching and learner support could be made more responsive to the prior experience of individual learners or a particular cohort.

Expectations of learners' prior skills and literacies

FE institutions take a far more proactive approach to assessment of prior skills, with comprehensive initial screening and guidance to learners on appropriate courses and support services. With the exception of English language requirements for overseas students, few HE institutions seem prepared to set out generic entry standards, devolving responsibility to departments through the course requirements and admissions system. From a widening participation perspective this reluctance is understandable, but at the same time there is recognition that learners are being failed, with consequences for retention further down the line.

- *'entry criteria are only a crude measure of skill, and teachers often express astonishment at "what their learners can't do"'*
- *Anecdotally, there is an expectation that students will arrive with a certain level of academic study and IT skills, although it is being recognised that this is not the case and measures related to the impact of this assumption on retention have been introduced*
- *we are beginning to recognise that significant numbers of our home students may not have English as their first language and therefore need additional support*

Learning contracts were mentioned several times in this context. Although these focus on learners' responsibilities rather than their capabilities, where they are used they do foreground expectations around study and provide an opportunity for learning literacies to be discussed.

The following are therefore 'assumptions' or 'expectations' rather than formal requirements – a situation which in itself is not conducive to learners' development! ICT and information skills were among the most frequently mentioned, suggesting that there is a widespread assumption that students entering HE will have a reasonable level of competence in these areas.

- the *ability* to learn and develop skills
- general academic skills (3): writing; self- and time-management; an understanding of *'what HE is all about'*
- IT/ICT skills (4)
- Info/digital/ICT (2): *'There is an assumption that they are able to engage with Information literacy, Digital literacy, Critical literacy, ICT skills, Information skills, Communication skills, Technology practice: at a level commensurate with entry to HE'. 'to utilise digital and information resources appropriate to their subject discipline'*

Several auditors were frank about the lack of support for learners who failed to live up to these expectations. Resources most mentioned were:

- academic staff in lectures and assignment briefings (again, feedback not mentioned)
There were attempts to look at service level provision by academics – but it was one way – and the academics were blamed publicly if the students didn't work.
- informal opportunities to access central services e.g. drop-ins, self-study materials
There is a learning agreement for students who access one to one support for skills... which encourages them to be proactive in terms of their own development

Informal and peer-supported literacy development

Asked about informal opportunities for learners to develop their literacies, half the auditors listed the resources that could be accessed from central services. The other half offered reflections on how, in practice, learners gain confidence and capability. These reflections are of course speculative – this would be a whole research programme in itself – but they do tie in with findings from the JISC Learners' experiences of e-learning programme, that there is an extensive informal curriculum of shared resources, peer support and individual work-arounds by which learners meet the requirements of the formal curriculum (Creanor et al., 2006). They are so central to this study that they are reproduced here:

- friends, peers, other students (7)
- tutors (informally e.g. by observation and modelling, 'chatting')(3)
- trial and error, practice (3)
- web (Google) (3)
- Facebook (2)
- Family (3)
- Print resources (1)
- Work colleagues (1)
- *'or just ignore it in case of English language ...though buying course work is also a solution we see used to attempt to overcome this'*
- *reading manuals for software and hardware operation ...*
- *I'm not sure anyone felt that they did develop these skills and literacies. They use the basic resources via Google and teach each other if they discover something useful.*
- *According to our 2008 Freshers survey 95% of our students use social networking tools e.g. Facebook but we do not know that they use it for developing skills and literacies.*

Some institutions, noting the value of peer support, are trying to encourage this more formally, and we asked about this.

None/just considering	4
Student ICT support/helpdesk	4 (one 'in development')
Within-programme buddies/mentors (some programmes only)	7
General student buddies/mentors	3
Students Union involved in support	3
Social networks	4
Other (Disability Circles of Support, Alumni involved in support)	2

Table 4.10: Types of peer support (existing or under consideration)

Comments in this and other sections of the audit indicate that Facebook is being widely used by students to discuss and share resources for study. Colleges and Universities now recognise this situation, and some are using Facebook pro-actively to support learners during work placements and in the process of transition. At most universities, members of teaching staff are free to set up social software groups to support course activities outside of the institutional learning environment, though there are issues around ownership of data and perceived encroachment on learners' 'private' online spaces. The picture is more contested in FE.

Personal technology and literacies

Both the Learning from Digital Natives (LDN) project and the JISC-funded Learner Experience of e-Learning programme have highlighted the pervasive nature of technology in learners' lives, and the potential benefits of using familiar communication, information and networking, ideally on personal devices such as mobile phones, i-pods and laptops. We therefore asked auditors about provision for learners to use personal technologies in institutional contexts.

FE colleges are in a particularly constrained situation because of their status *in loco parentis* to learners under the age of 18. However, at one of the two colleges in our audit, wireless access and social software were available for students to use across the campus.

On the evidence of this audit, most universities now provide wireless access for learners using their own laptops or other wireless-enabled devices on campus, and support to help them do so. Wireless coverage may be patchy and is often not available in student accommodation.

Many offer social and web 2.0 applications on institutional PCs, and/or allow staff and students to instal and use such software over the network, with limitations (see below). Second to student expectations, the main driver for change in this area seemed to be the practice of forward-thinking staff:

An ever increasing number of teaching staff, and also staff in support areas including the library as detailed in Section 3, are using blogs, wikis, podcasts and other tools and applications to extend and enrich the learning and support experience in ways that are not possible working solely within classroom spaces and the VLE.

Restrictions were noted on the use of video streaming, peer-to-peer networks, support for Macs, and downloading of external services and applications onto institutional machines. Also, software support continues to be limited to institutionally-hosted systems such as email and the VLE. Given the value of social networks and online services, particularly in supporting transition and peer learning, it is encouraging that ICT support policies are under review at many of the participating institutions.

Qualitative review of snapshot data

Two of the six examples submitted in the learner-led category were from FE colleges and one from the schools sector, where forward-thinking practice is taking place at key transitions and on the boundaries between formal and informal learning. (Birmingham Schools, Carnegie College, Writtle College). Key points of interest from these three examples:

- Technologies in the hands of learners, such as Flip cameras and PDAs which they can physically handle, and software such as social networking tools with which they are already familiar, can give learners more confidence in a learning situation (but while this lowers barriers of confidence, it is not enough to enable deep learning)
- Learners have different skills and practices, particularly when it comes to technology. Without formally identifying mentors and mentees, peer learning can take place quickly in the context of exciting and motivating group tasks.
- Mentors and mentees both experience learning benefits, though different in kind.
- All the examples focused on whole-person development with personal and interpersonal skills to the fore.
- None of these examples was formally assessed: learners defined their own goals or projects and achieved recognition for a wide variety of different outcomes.
- There were no problems of learner motivation reported in these cases: on the contrary, there were positive findings about learners' engagement and enthusiasm.

The closest University equivalent to this kind of peer-supported practice came from Bradford's DevelopMe! initiative. A ning-based site is enabling pre-induction students to meet others, begin the social transition to university, talk about their expectations, and be introduced to some of the expectations that they will have to meet as students. The success of this initiative is clear not only from the level of engagement and positive evaluation findings, but the number of other institutions taking a similar approach. This multi-layered snapshot is well worth reading in full.

Wrasse at the University of Plymouth, the LexDis 'ideas for e-learning' resource at Southampton, and STRIDE at Hertfordshire (included in the 'curriculum' category) represent a more structured approach to peer support. Materials provided by learners are edited and collated by central services staff. The

value and credibility of the materials are amplified through selection and commentary, and users are further supported with search facilities and guidance materials relating to specific aspects of study. This is very different from the web 2.0 model, not least in the effort and resources involved – all three received some form of external funding to support development – but it does send a very strong message that staff take learners' experiences seriously. All have been positively evaluated by learners.

If provision is to be credible to learners, integrated around the real challenges they face, and focused on effective practice rather than on component skills, we would expect it to look much like this. Explicit examples of practice from learners' own perspective ('this is how I did it'), are validated by the commentary from tutors ('this is why it was effective'). These learning resources then need to be coupled with opportunities for learners to review and adapt their own practices in the context of meaningful tasks.

Reflections on the audit data

In this section, auditors were asked what their institution was doing well in the area of learning and digital literacies, and what they thought were the significant gaps. They were also asked what action(s) they thought the institution should prioritise as an outcome of the audit. Most respondents canvassed opinions from a range of staff to help them complete this section, as they were advised to in the guidance notes.

Below is a summary of their responses.

Best institutional practice	Gaps and challenges	Priority actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institution-wide commitment and joined-up thinking • A multi-layered approach to provision: within courses, strong central services, and peer support • Student and staff literacies addressed in tandem • Concern for literacies embedded into programme design and validation • Flexibility, personalisation and 'the situating of learning in everyday life' • Recognition of the emotional and personal aspects of literacy and of learning • Learning development as a unifying idea • assessment of study skills on entry • e-portfolio – provides integration across the learning experience • Recognition and reward for innovation in central service provision as well as academic practice <p>Specifics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendly, approachable individuals in central roles • Information literacy is 'already being done well' by libraries • Where e-learning unit is driving force there is often good provision and joined-up thinking between ICT, information and knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Scattered', 'incoherent', 'inconsistent' nature of provision: makes gaps difficult to identify • Silos – either schools are strong but ideas are not shared – or central services are individually strong but there are problems joining up at point of need • Changing student body (rising numbers, less understanding of higher education, more basic skills gaps) is creating strains in system • Financial and staffing constraints on services and/or number of students requiring support • Lack of awareness among staff and students of the provision available • Student outcomes rarely assessed in terms of learning literacies • The skills required still not well defined or exemplified • Still not embedded enough into programmes – students need to see literacies in context of subject knowledge and practice: <i>The 'reifying' of the skills agenda, separating it from learning and living - which is embodied most in the 'core skills' module or 'PDP module' - is a deficit-based practice which is hard to shift</i> • Emphasis on teaching subject content rather than how learners are gaining capability. • Continual change in strategy and priority: • <i>'the processes and structures that should be supporting its delivery are constantly changed</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update module documentation to reflect more up to date thinking about literacies • Ensure literacies agenda is translated <i>via</i> programme documentation <i>into</i> learning, teaching and assessment – lecture plans and study guides useful intermediaries • Share good practice in generic educational design across schools • Audit digital literacy practices and share (especially from applied into pure academic depts; and good examples of skills and content being addressed in integrated way) • Make academic managers aware of the importance of the digital literacies agenda, in terms of the student experience and employability • Consolidate, integrate, embed • Learn from experience with key skills and PDP: danger learners won't see the point. • Start from where learners are, identify what they can do well, and situate skills development in real professional/inquiry-based activities • Bring digital literacy skills to fore in core modules • Reduce or eliminate skills modules and absorb content into other modules • Continue/enhance the 'going native' approach of learning experts in schools, and seconded academic staff

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study skills sessions generally very popular and produce good results • Careers/employability needs to be integrated with other services throughout study • Face-to-face support when they need it; 24/7 access to online resources when they can find out for themselves. • Ensuring public and learning spaces support learners' use of personal ICT and preferred study practices • Practitioners getting experience designing courses where learner needs are primary focus • Digital 'champions' in depts • Strong tutorial system and dedicated, well-resourced tutors 	<p><i>so the paradigm of excellence in teaching and learning is devalued. What a pity.'</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness and expertise are lacking among senior managers <p>Specific gaps in provision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • international students, distance or work-based learning students • Skills/PDP modules are separated from the discipline knowledge: students are often poorly motivated by them • IT skills in particular have not been embedded into the curriculum in a meaningful way. • No strategies on digital literacies explicitly, and little discussion of the issue • No discourse of entitlement or student parity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upskill personal tutors as academic advisers • Integrate learning services with pastoral / welfare support (recognising emotional/whole-life context of barriers to study) • Strengthen role of personal portfolio • Anticipate students' needs over whole course and address literacies as/when needed, in a form relevant to immediate study goals • Staff and student skills must be planned for in tandem
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Table 4.11: Institutional challenges and priorities in learning literacy provision

Eleven out of the 14 who responded to this section believed it was either true or largely true that '*The vast majority of students leave the institution with enhanced levels of learning literacy*', though one of the remaining 3 auditors described students graduating '*innumerate*' and with '*appalling*' levels of English usage' which reflected badly on the institution.

Seven respondents thought it was 'true' that *Learners have support for learning development throughout their studies*, though a significant minority (5) thought it was only 'partly true' at their institutions. Respondents were also divided over whether '*Learners have opportunities to practice their skills and literacies in subject contexts*' and were much less confident that '*The institution actively identifies and intervenes to support learners who are struggling*'.

Asked about the issues that were driving their institutional response to the literacy agenda, respondents gave the following rank ordering.

Student expectations	40
Employability agenda and employers as stakeholders*	39
Dealing with a more diverse student population	32
Changing technologies and digital practices	32
External funding and policy drivers	18
Internal leadership and special initiatives	15
Staff champions on the ground	13
Other	10

*The employability agenda is the clear winner if first priorities only are considered (6 choices, as compared to the next nearest score of 2 for student expectations, diversity and changing technologies).

Table 4.12: Drivers for institutional action on learning literacy

These auditors clearly felt that deep structural changes in the context of education were driving the literacies agenda, rather than any short-term funding opportunities, initiatives or enthusiasms. Students and employers as stakeholders are perceived as key forces behind the agenda for change.

Finally, auditors were asked to anticipate how the situation might change at their institution over the coming 3 years. One was extremely pessimistic about the direction of change: '*resources will continue to be taken out, the role of learning and teaching will continue not to be prioritised*'. All other respondents felt that institutional policy and practice was moving in the direction of greater recognition, articulation, embedding and support for literacies of the digital, particularly in a context of economic downturn and increased competition for high-value jobs.

- Technologies in the hands of learners, such as Flip cameras and PDAs which they can physically handle, and software such as social networking tools with which they are already familiar, can give learners more confidence in a learning situation (but while this lowers barriers of confidence, it is not enough to enable deep learning)

Specific trends highlighted

Context:

- an increased focus on digital literacies, trans-literacies and multi-modal literacies, likely to be regarded as essential for employment and further study
- A growing focus on participation and citizenship within global networked society (e-citizenship, sustainable development)

Learning and teaching:

- the role of technology in supporting learning and in defining literacy/capability will be enhanced: 'technology enhanced learning' attempts to capture more explicitly the enhancing role of ICT upon learning.
- A greater focus on collaborative learning, particularly in digital networks
- A greater commitment to supporting learner-led collaborations and learner-generated content and resources

Institutions:

- expansion of part time, work-based and distance learning provision
- employability an area of increasingly urgent focus
- *the use of explicit 'rights and responsibilities' or some sort of learning contract*
- *targeted support for identifying and helping students 'at risk'*
- *knowledge management in the institution will change, making it easier to share teaching practice*
- *the skills agenda will... be subsumed into deeper issues around curriculum and learning design and flexible provision*

A final reflection on the audit process came in a comment on this section:

At the bottom of all this are our students, many of whom have struggled to come here, some of whom are the first in the family to do so. If we don't resource the literacies and skills they need in the difficult world of employment they face, then I feel that we really disrespect their efforts and achievements, and I wonder just how comfortable each of us would feel if we realized that to be the case

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