

T20/21 Digital Education

School/ Directorate

Library and Learning Centre

Person Responsible

Natalie Lafferty

Created

7th July, 2020

Last Review

7th July, 2020

Status

Complete

Next Review

24th December, 2020

Screening Data

What is the name/title of the policy/activity?

Toward 2020/2021 Digital Education project

Describe the aim, objective and intended consequences of the policy/activity.

The aim of this work is to deliver a quality education to students at the University of Dundee, through a blended learning approach, to overcome the challenges presented by the Covid 19 pandemic. This work will also contribute longer terms to a multi faceted method of teaching.

In the short term the work will take into account the capacity of the University to teach remotely and this requires a framework to determine which modules are viable for this period of time, the skills of staff to develop their teaching content into a blended module, the digital systems required to support an international student body and the assurance that students will be delivered a quality product in order for them to achieve their best in their studies.

Throughout this, the accessibility and usability of modules and methods of delivery are key. A separate EIA has been undertaken for the digital needs for this work to happen successfully.

In relation to staffing matters, a separate EIA around the impact on staff of moving to online and re-assessing module content has been undertaken.

Who is responsible for the policy/activity and who implements it?

The development of the process to achieve a blended learning and teaching approach is being led by the Toward 2020/2021 Steering Group, whose chair is the Vice Principal of Education. The individual project for Digital Education is being led by Natalie Lafferty, who is Assistant Director of the University Library and Learning Centre.

The implementation of much of the requirements will be by individual Deans, Lecturers and Programme and Module leads.

The development of staff to achieve the competence with systems to move to blended teaching, is the responsibility of the Digital Education workstream.

Who is effected by this policy?

This approach has a direct impact on students either continuing to or wishing to study at the University of Dundee. It also has a direct impact of staff, initially in the steps to make changes to current teaching practices to move to a blended teaching style and potentially in their daily work routine, both in terms of how they will deliver teaching, when and also what. (module changes)

Is there any indication that this policy is relevant to equality and the protected characteristics or that those with any of the protected characteristics will have a different experience in relation to the intended outcomes of the policy?

As the University has an international audience in its students and also in the students they wish to attract, the approach has a relevance to race and ethnicity. Restrictions placed on travel due to the Covid19 pandemic, mean many students will not be allowed to travel to the Dundee and Fife campuses. This is the primary driving force behind the move to digital education, to allow all our students to continue to study.

Concerns include the availability of the right systems to allow international students access the teaching programme; teaching times which are asynchronous and political restrictions which may restrict access to some elements of some programmes and the systems being used. Issues such as home environments, which may present challenges for home study are relevant to all students.

In relation to international staff, the ability to undertake the changes necessary will also be dependent on usability of systems and the challenges of having a good working environment.

Over 1600 students are currently supported by the University's Disability Services, and this is a number that has continued to rise year on year for a number of years now. Ensuring that students studying remotely have access to the equipment and services they need to support them and also the systems which support accessibility for a range of disabilities is critical.

In relation to the other protected groups, there may be varying impacts related to the changes to module content, particularly where that content represents a minority group and promotes inclusion. These smaller elements may be seen as easier options for removing, however their role is significant for the minority communities they portray or represent. In addition, removing modules may have an impact on staff, in particular those who are hourly paid. A separate EIA has been undertaken in relation to staff implications.

In relation to race and ethnicity, we have around 4000 international and non UK students and the business aim of the University is to increase that number year on year. In addition we have working relationships with a number of international Universities in China, Malaysia, India and the Middle East.

We have over 1600 students currently registered for support through our Disability Services. This is likely to rise in the new semester. We have 4% of our staff registered as having a disability and that figure is believed to be much higher.

Recommend this EA for Full Analysis?

Yes

Comments

The Digital Education project is relevant to equality and in particular to the protected characteristics of disability and race. It is however also relevant to the other characteristics, given that decisions are having to be taken to reduce the modules and content to accommodate the quick turnaround of the digital approach as a direct result of Covid 19.

Relevance to age includes facilitating the successful communication between two different age groups, with different fundamental experience of the digital landscape, having platforms and resources that are accessible and usable for those with disabilities, considering accessibility and usability across different geographic areas, thinking about cultural and economic implications across different demographics of an international student group, acknowledging the disproportionate impact on staff or students with caring responsibilities, particularly women, in the light of lock down of facilities and travel restrictions and the impact on students from the removal of some modules which for workload and low take up reasons cannot continue at this time.

Widening use of a range of digital platforms, the ability to transition from a face to face teaching environment to a blended environment and changes in working styles, times and subjects are all relevant in this project.

Rate this EA

High

Impact Assessment Data

Is this policy relevant to the protected characteristic of Age?

- Yes

In relation to the project overall, there are two distinct age groups; the students, whose average age is in the low 20's and the staff who are moving their teaching to a blended model, which will include online synchronous and asynchronous teaching. The staff average age is in their late 40's.

The emerging issue is that of staff having difficulty in translating their teaching module to an online version and developing their confidence in using educational technologies. Many have not altered their style of delivery for a number of years. They are being supported to make this change by tuition and coaching.

This may not be entirely related to age difference, but the clear difference in age groups would imply that it is.

In addition, the move to make these changes has resulted in a significant increase in the workload of staff, whether in planning the change or in making the changes needed to modules.

Is this policy relevant to the protected characteristic of Disability?

- Yes

The University supports around 1700 students who are registered with our Disability Services. This number has increased year on year with increasing understanding and diagnosis of a range of disabilities, which include, physical, mental, neurodiverse and learning disabilities.

Around 4% of our staff have disclosed a disability, although that figure is believed to be higher.

The digital world can present a range of barriers to those with disabilities, including usability and accessibility issues in the design and delivery mechanism of information. The University in moving to a blended learning has to take account of these when deciding the platforms to use and quality assuring the modules that are being progressed.

In addition, the University provides specialist equipment for those with disabilities and to date all students and staff currently registered for that support have been provided with their specialist equipment.

In relation to the platforms being used, their compatibility and accessibility must be tested to ensure they are accessible for disability and that the accessible platforms are available to all.

In relation to the design of the online modules, the University has a Web Policy and guidance document which provides clear guidance on preparing materials for accessibility on the web. This is in line with 2018 legislation.

A survey of students registered with the University Disability Services identified some key challenges relating to disability and digital learning;

1. Lack of software for compatibility. This would normally be provided available at the Library and Learning Centre.
2. Difficulty with online learning due to the nature of the disability, where face to face interaction is a key element of the learning.
3. Inability to check easily with fellow students and discuss to clarify which is vital for some neuro diverse students.
4. Quality of video and speakers caused difficulties for some.
5. IT/access challenges relating to location and also new platforms and their ease of accessibility.

Is this policy relevant to the protected characteristic of Gender Reassignment?

- Yes

The move to online learning has no direct relevance to someone who is, has or is intending to transition. However there may be unintended consequences from the decisions taken on which modules to remove. The criteria for removing a module includes student numbers. Where an optional module is relevant to gender re-assignment or other protected groups and has a low attendance, the impact may be felt more significantly on a minority group than would be by a wider audience.

A survey of the modules removed in terms of their content would show whether subjects specific to under represented

groups are disproportionately affected.

Is this policy relevant to the protected characteristic of Marriage and Civil Partnership?

- No

The project does not have any relevance to marriage and civil partnership

Is this policy relevant to the protected characteristic of Pregnancy and Maternity?

- Yes

There is relevance in so far as the additional workload for staff to move to a digital platform and then to deliver out with usual teaching times may impact on arrangements for anti natal and post natal appointments, as well as on any medical or caring responsibilities. The arrangements for maternity leave remain in place and this should support those in the later stages of pregnancy or have had their child, however managers need to be mindful of the change in both workload and work times that, combined with pregnancy, may have a greater impact in relation to this protected characteristics.

It should be noted that there is already significant evidence of a reduction in publications from women academics throughout the Covid 19 lockdown because of child and other caring responsibilities.

Is this policy relevant to the protected characteristic of Race?

- Yes

Around 4000 of our student population are from EU or international. The scheduling of digital lectures, workshops etc, is going to have to take account of time differences across the globe and consider how a truly blended form of teaching can be provided to address this. Asynchronous teaching may be an obvious option, however that will exclude international students from live debate and engagement with fellow students, a key part of learning. As well as timetabling, the availability of space to study effectively will be challenging for some. Access to equipment and the digital platforms may not be available to all, depending on location, financial support and also political challenges, where governments censor digital information. These challenges need to be explored further and feedback from international students gathered to capture a picture of their experience.

In addition, when matters of no detriment are considered, these challenges must form part of that discussion.

In relation to staff, similar challenges exist for usability and accessibility to platforms, if the staff member has travelled to be with family out with Dundee and the UK.

Is this policy relevant to the protected characteristic of Religion and Belief?

- Yes

There is no indication that there is direct implications for particular faith or secular groups, however, as with Gender Re-assignment, there may be modules which are specifically related to faith matters. Part of the criteria for reducing modules is related to the numbers attending. That may have unintended consequences of removing a module for a particular study field which is relevant to minority groups and in this case in relation to religion and belief.

Is this policy relevant to the protected characteristic of Sex?

- Yes

The impact on sex relates to both the planning and the delivery of digital learning. Initially the steps to plan for and move to a blended learning approach have taken place during lockdown and lockdown has seen a significant impact on women in relation to increased childcare and other caring responsibilities. This for many has been combined with the challenge of holding down a job while working from home.

The added workload associated with the move to digital learning is likely to have a greater impact on women.

In relation to students, the issue is similar, with students who have child care and other caring responsibilities, likely to find digital studying challenging because of the additional workload.

In addition to this, international students may have cultural barriers to face when studying remotely. Cultural norms that exist in home towns may mean that there is limited access for women to technologies in areas where there is a clear delineation of the roles of men and women. Several reports highlights such challenges in Asia and Africa.

The University has repeatedly advised staff to 'do what they can', however timescales on the development of digital teaching is tight.

This has affected all aspects of the Toward 2020/2021 project, from student recruitment, strategic planning, finance through to the development of modules, and has been especially challenging for those with caring responsibilities. Workload associated with the move to digital education is likely to continue for some time.

Is this policy relevant to the protected characteristic of Sexual Orientation?

- Yes

In line with Religion and Belief and Gender Reassignment, there is no direct implication related to sexual orientation, however the unintended consequence of the process for reducing modules for the blended learning, may see modules of specific interest to a minority of students, related to sexual orientation, removed from the curriculum, certainly for the forthcoming academic year.

Quality Assurance should capture any indication that equality related modules make up a disproportionate part of the modules that are removed from the curriculum.

Taking account of the findings so far, is there a possibility that the implementation of this policy would result in a different experience or a detriment for those with protected characteristics?

- Yes

The Digital Education project is relevant to the protected characteristics and also the duty to promote equality of opportunity, foster good relations and eliminate unlawful discrimination.

At planning for move to digital, there are risks related to accessibility for disabled staff and student users, where barriers for accessibility need to be addressed.

In the streamlining of the programs, there is a risk that topics related to minority groups, which may well have fewer students, will be more likely to be removed, resulting in a disproportionate detrimental impact on those minority groups and reducing our opportunity to promote equality of opportunity.

In preparing modules for digital use, there is a disproportionate impact on women who are having to carry the greater responsibility for caring, particularly child care, which working from home and seeing an increase in that workload.

In delivering the programs, issues of accessibility, usability (access to platforms), time differences, lack of collective learning opportunities, supportive learning environments and additional caring responsibilities that conflict with teaching or learning are all likely to affect the overall learning experience of students and the workload of lecturers. These are linked to those with disabilities, race, social inequality and gender. However there is a general impact on people based in their individual experience of the blended teaching and learning environment, which will be different for everyone.

In relation to teaching on campus, there will be concerns and increased anxiety for some who may not fall into the defined categories of 'at risk'. Individual conversations should be had between student and tutor and staff and managers to consider this and a way to reduce that anxiety.

No detriment reviews need to take account of all of these factors when considering outcomes for students.

Based on your findings so far, what recommendations or changes (if any) would you make in relation to the policy and how it is implemented?

The move to digital education is intrinsically linked to equality, diversity and inclusion and the Universities ability to meet the statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, foster good relations and eliminate unlawful discrimination. It extends beyond the protected groups in so far as workload, accessibility to broadband and social inequalities reach across all staff and students. However in relation to the protected groups, there is particular relevance to those with disabilities, race and also gender.

Digital provides challenges for those with disabilities and on campus a great deal can be done to support those individuals. However remote support is limited and it is important that modules are developed with digital accessibility in the forefront of the design. Alternative options for study materials and lectures should be available where the digital is not either accessible or available.

In relation to race, the time differences, availability of study space, availability of broadband to access lecturers and availability of systems are all relevant. Alternative options to access lectures and study materials should be available and consideration of the study environment and challenges should be considered in any 'no detriment' decisions.

For gender, the main issue of inequality is the loss of support for child care and other care during lockdown and beyond. This has a disproportionate impact on women, who carry the main responsibility for caring in households around the world, including the UK. In addition cultural norms may impact the ability to study remotely for some women and men, particularly in relation to international students.

Alternative options to access lectures and study materials should be available for those with accessibility challenges, including those related to disability, social inequality and broadband availability. In addition time differences for teaching and study can be helped by the availability of these alternative options.

'No detriment' decisions should take account of a range of situations, including enhanced caring responsibilities for children and families, availability of suitable study environments, cultural challenges and emerging evidence of increased risk.

Suggestions to improve the challenges include voice overs for slides, increasing 1 to 1 interactions with lecturers/advisors, capture live lectures for use later, provide Q and A opportunities in workshops and online tutorials.

For staffing, there is little evidence at present of who is affected by the reduction of the teaching modules. Data to identify this gap should be gathered and this will contribute to a separate EIA on staff impact.

Specifically for disability accessibility, user testing is suggested for the key platforms to be used by staff and students to ensure suitability for assistive technology and other disability needs. This point will be reflected in the EIA for Digital Systems.

Where you have recommended actions/changes to the policy, what are the timescales for completion of these

31-08-2020

What monitoring arrangements do you have in place to identify changes in any impact or relevance?

Given the urgency of the implementation of the Digital Education project, the main method of monitoring for effectiveness of the approach will be through ongoing pulse checks with both staff and students to gain a clear picture of experience. In addition gathering any feedback from students who choose to NOT study to identify if and how digital education might be a factor in that decision.

The University is also taking steps to highlight staff awareness of accessibility and plans are progressing on developing web guides and accessibility workshops. We will monitor the roll out of these resources and guides and extend the programmes of sessions to support teaching staff as they work to develop accessible teaching resources. In addition the intention is to develop a network of accessibility champions across Schools who can identify additional training and support needs.

Similarly we are able to produce audit reports on the accessibility of learning resources within the VLE based on our use of Blackboard Ally. These reports will be shared with Schools and can be used to help inform where further support and training may be needed to enable us to further improve the accessibility of teaching resources.

Comments

Digital education has significant implication for equality, diversity and inclusion. In the main the impact and likelihood of detriment is on those with disabilities, this includes such as learning and developmental disabilities, neuro diverse conditions, physical and sensory disabilities.

Accessibility to digital systems is one of the key challenges and having compatible systems for assistive technology in particular. In addition, the design of modules to be delivered online needs to meet accessibility standards, if they are to be successfully translated to the student.

In relation to race, the main difficulty will be timing of lectures and workshops due to international time differences and also the availability of access to broadband for access to the material.

Social inequality will mean that some students are unable to access computer facilities and equipment.

These points are reflected in the survey of UoD students, supported by the University Disability Services, as set out in the previous section and supported by a survey carried out by the School of Computing and Engineering with their students.

Challenges to access for international students and issues relating to social inequality

For staff, the implications relate to workload and also confidence in delivering modules digitally. Research by Bristol University across the UK found that only half of academics responding felt prepared and comfortable delivering their modules online. This will impact on all students, unless academics are fully equipped to make the change successfully. Amongst the findings were increases in the number of students disclosing anxiety

around accessing the online learning platforms, which would not usually be the case. The survey also indicated that academics felt their workload would increase overall as a result of digital education, with the greatest increase in the first year of the change. (COVID-19 and digital disruption in UK universities: afflictions and affordances of emergency online migration; Richard Watermeyer 1 & Tom Crick2 & Cathryn Knight2 & Janet Goodall2)

To address these challenges, there are a number of steps that could be considered;

- The first is to have digital materials available in another format for those who have challenges accessing the materials. This would support some with disabilities and also those who have challenges accessing digital platforms for any number of reasons including race, gender and social inequality.
- Providing staff with the necessary up skilling to support them to develop and deliver their subjects in a blended way.
- Ensuring funding is available for those students who require it to have access to the right equipment to access their courses
- Ensuring those students with disabilities have access to their specific needs to support their learning.

Update at 17/09/2020 - continuous development of modules in accessible formats ongoing and expected to be in place by start of Semester 1.

Ongoing briefings, training, information and guidance made available to staff to develop accessible modules and information

Hardship funding extended to overseas students agreed and being provided to purchase necessary equipment
All students registered for Disability Support provided with their specific reasonable adjustment for accessing resources.

Organisation Sign-off Data

Having read the EIA, do you approve its findings and recommendations?

- Yes

What are your reasons for approving/not approving the EIA?

The rapidly developing Covid 19 pandemic has presented a number of challenges that have compelled the University to urgently consider what changes needed to be made to ensure the continuity of teaching whilst ensuring the health and safety of its staff and students. The move to blended learning underpinned by digital education approaches helps to address these current challenges.

Firstly a digital approach enables both staff and students to access and deliver teaching and learning in a safe environment whilst the risk of Covid is still significant and the longer term consequences generally remain unknown. This solution does however also create additional challenges around full accessibility for all students and staff. While we would like all of these issues to be addressed for a number of reasons that may not be possible for all. It is our view at this time, that in order to achieve a significant degree of teaching provision and ensure the continuation of our students' studies, the steps that we have taken are significant towards achieving that legitimate aim.

The University's core business is education and research. It depends on income from its students and contributions from all staff. To not take these steps towards developing and delivering courses in a blended learning approach, supported by digital education technologies, could have a critical long term impact on its staff and students. Adopting this approach ensures that the University also fulfils its moral responsibility to support the continuity of teaching to current students thereby enabling them to continue with their higher education studies.

If you have approved the EIA, do you agree with the monitoring arrangements in place?

- Yes

Whilst the University has had to respond swiftly to the unfolding Covid 19 it is committed to monitoring the approaches being developed to meet the various challenges. The pulse checks with staff and students will help to highlight any specific issues relating to the blended digital learning approaches. The accessibility champions will similarly be able to identify more specific issues in their own Schools. Audits of learning resources in the VLE will also indicate where academics may require targeted support in the development of their teaching resources. Collectively these activities

will enable the University to continue to critically reflect on practise and support rapid cycles of improvement to help us address the challenges.

Where you have not approved the monitoring process, what other steps do you require to be taken?

Not applicable

Comments

The impact is wide reaching, but unavoidable in many ways. However the move to digital education, that has been thought through and takes steps to mitigate detriment as far as possible, allows students to continue to learn and staff to continue to be employed.

Much is being undertaken to mitigate, including providing funding for student to get equipment, up staff to develop and deliver digital education that is accessible and usable, and provision of equipment for those requiring reasonable adjustments. In addition a 'No detriment' approach is being taken to studies changed through the Covid 19 situation and mitigating circumstances for staff includes recognition of workload and additional caring responsibilities.

Monitoring will allow the continual improvement of the blended learning approach and for that reason staff and student feedback is vital.

Next Review Date

2020-12-24

Outstanding Actions

No outstanding actions