

Forum Insights for Students in Higher Education

REPORT

Online Learning Task Force,

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

Key insights for students

Students' expectations

- 'Students expect high-quality, flexible online learning experiences' (p.3).
- Students' expectations in respect of technology-enhanced and online learning are increasing.
- 'Students prefer a choice in how they learn—information and communication technology (ICT) is seen as one of many possibilities, alongside part-time and traditional full-time learning, and face-to-face teaching' (p.8).
- 'Technology needs to enhance student choice and meet or exceed learners' expectations' (p.5).
- With the growing demand for work-based, flexible, and part-time higher education, "going to university" will take on many, varied meanings and manifestations over the next ten years' (p.4).

Engaging with online learning

- 'Learners are increasingly able to navigate high-quality, open and online resources and can do this through social networks, which in some cases are more supportive contexts in which to develop skills' (p.9).
- However 'students need greater support to ensure their study and academic literacy skills are fit for the digital age' (p.5).
- 'A major concern for students is the lack of personal [...] contact with their tutors and fellow students in online learning. Learning in virtual worlds is a possible solution for students, as is use of effective online conferencing. [...] Institutions need to enable students to enter and learn collaboratively online' (p.17).
- 'Students value the incorporation of ICT into their learning experience but the extent to which this occurs varies depending on course, type of study and assessment' (p.8).
- 'Students expressed concerns regarding the ICT competencies of lecturers [...], with 21 per cent of students thinking their lecturers need additional training' (p.8).
- 'Students prefer to be regarded as partners in the development of online learning rather than mere recipients' (p.8).
- 'Learning environments and contexts are becoming increasingly participative and the learner's contribution is highly valued by teaching professionals' (pp.9–10).

Opportunities

- 'Online distance learning (ODL) provides students with the flexibility to study at their own pace, in their own time and at a location convenient to them' (p.10).
- Online learning has the potential to reduce the cost of higher education for students.
- Online learning should encourage a greater diversity of students to participate in higher education.
- 'Students are attracted to the potential of online learning to enable them to interact with students from different backgrounds and countries' (p.9).
- National student surveys have the potential to increase understanding of students' experiences of online learning and technology.

Challenges

- 'Identifying online distance learning courses on the web can be a challenge for prospective students because information about the courses is often "hidden" in complex institutional web-sites' (p.10).
- 'Any Student Charters that are developed would have to take into account online learning to ensure they were relevant to all students' (p.10).