



**University of
Nottingham**
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Digital Experience Insights 2022: Executive Summary

Investigating student, staff and researcher expectations of
the digital environment

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Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to report to Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC) about the student and staff experience of the digital environment as captured via the institution-wide deployment of Jisc's Digital Experience Insights (DEI) Surveys in March 2022.

In particular, TLC is asked to:

1. Note the findings presented, considering the relevance to the University's ESE SDP and Action Plan as well as their own Faculty / Professional Service Department strategy and plans.
2. Approve the principle that the University runs the DEI survey again in 3 years (AY24/25).

For information:

- In the autumn term, Libraries will be conducting further data analysis on the DEI data set to understand any significantly different results for APP student groups. Key findings from this work should be available in early 2023.
- In the autumn term, Libraries will provide any relevant DEI findings that evidence educational enhancement in its contribution to the TEF submission.

Introduction and Method

What is the DEI survey?

The Digital Experience Insights (DEI) survey is a national survey run by JISC. The aim of the survey is to provide valuable insight into the student and staff experience of the digital environment at a Higher Education Institution.

This is the third year that the University of Nottingham has run the survey, providing some useful trends over time. The timings of the surveys mean they also provide valuable insight at different stages of the Covid pandemic (see Figure 1).

In 2022, there were four versions of the survey, each one targeting a different cohort of the University population:

1. **Students:** open to all undergraduate and PGT students
2. **Teaching Staff:** open to all R&T and teaching-focused staff
3. **Researchers:** open to researchers at all stages of their research journey from PGR onwards
4. **Professional Services:** open to staff in all Professional Services departments

Each of the four surveys is structured into four main sections (see Figure 2). Each survey has c.30 questions, providing a wealth of feedback and data. Some of the questions are comparable between the four surveys to allow for comparison across the different University cohorts.

DEI Surveys at UoN

Feb 2020: Pre-pandemic
Mar 2021: Mid-pandemic
Mar 2022: Emerging from the pandemic

Figure 1: Timing of DEI Surveys

DEI Survey Structure

Theme 1: You & Your Technology
Theme 2: Technology at your Organisation
Theme 3: Technology in your Role
Theme 4: Developing your Digital Skills

Figure 2: DEI Survey Structure

Administration of the survey and use of its results is supported by a cross-University Working Group, covering many areas across the University (see [Appendix](#)).

What response did we get to the 2022 DEI Survey?

Across the four surveys we received c.2,400 responses. This compares with c.4,000 in 2020 and c.4,100 in 2021. The response rates for students and professional services staff mean there is greater confidence in the findings for these cohorts at an institutional level (results for these surveys are statistically significant at a 95% level of confidence). There is lower confidence in the findings for researchers and teaching staff. For these cohorts the findings still give a reasonable indication of sentiment and views across the population, but to strengthen confidence in the results users of the data may want to compare the findings with other available information, including previous year's DEI data where statistical confidence at an institutional level was achieved.

What do the DEI Surveys tell us?

Given each survey has c.30 questions the surveys tell us a lot, although it is important to be mindful of where limitations in the data may exist. This executive summary outlines some of the key findings at an institutional level. However, this list of key findings is not exhaustive and further, more detailed findings are outlined in the accompanying [DEI 2022 Detailed Findings](#) report. Even greater levels of detail are available in the [Tableau Dashboard](#), which is the best place for comprehensively viewing the results and applying filters for comparative purposes.

Key Findings

Below are some of the key findings from this year's DEI. These findings are split by theme, and particularly explore what is going well and where there could be improvements, considering factors such as trends over time, comparisons with national benchmarks, and where responses significantly differ for different cohorts.

Due to TLC's focus, the key findings have been drawn principally from the student and teaching staff surveys. Please note that only some comparisons have been possible between the current surveys and previous iterations of the surveys due to changes to the questions made by Jisc and, at the time of writing, the benchmarking data that is available (only student survey, presently). The headlines refer to data at institutional level.

Intentionally, the key findings do not lead to the inclusion of recommendations in this paper, since these will vary depending on context within the University. Readers of this report should therefore consider what these findings indicate for their own context, and any implications for strategy or delivery (see Purpose section above), including any ESE SDP work packages. This is in line with discussion and agreement at TLC when considering last year's DEI survey results.

Finally, it is useful to note how this DEI data provides helpful evidence when evaluating the University's maturity against the recent 'Framework for our Education' outlined in the PVC ESE's White Paper, ['Education for the Future'](#).

THEME 1: YOU AND YOUR TECHNOLOGY

What's going well?

- ✓ **Use of assistive technology appears to have risen over the last three years across all cohorts:** For example, the table below shows the % of respondents saying they do not use any assistive technologies. As can be seen, this has fallen dramatically over three years of the surveys. Part of this is likely due to changes in the question, but the detailed data does also show usage of specific, named assistive technologies that has increased over time.

	Students	Teaching Staff	Researchers	PS Staff
2020	78%	89%	Survey didn't run	91%
2021	84%	87%	88%	95%
2022	45%	43%	52%	69%

- ✓ **Similarly, there has been a significant increase in all cohorts reporting they have been offered support to use these additional features:** The table below outlines the % of respondents who believe they have been offered support with assistive technology features. The dip in 2021 is likely to be at least partly caused by Covid, but the overall trends are still encouraging.

	Students	Teaching Staff	Researchers	PS Staff
2020	22%	17%	Survey didn't run	20%
2021	13%	5%	9%	7%
2022	30%	40%	20%	23%

- ✓ **7% of our students are using devices which the University has either loaned to them or helped them to buy:** Practice here appears to vary across Schools, so it may be worth further exploring the different approaches.

Where could there be improvements?

- **Despite significant improvement in the support offered to students regarding their use of assistive technologies, results are slightly below the RG:** the % of students reporting that they had been offered support with assistive technologies is 30% for the University of Nottingham compared to 35% for the RG average.

THEME 2: TECHNOLOGY AT YOUR ORGANISATION

What's going well?

- ✓ **The student experience of the University's online learning environment is positive:** 82% of students rated the quality of the online learning environment as good or better. This compares with 77% for the RG and 78% for the HE sector. This was a new question for 2022 so a trend over time is not available.
- ✓ **Significant improvement in the professional service staff experience of the online working environment:** 85% of PS staff rated the quality of the online working environment as good or better compared with 60% in 2020.

	2020	2021	2022
P.S. Staff	60%	Not Asked	85%

Where could there be improvements?

- **There is a significant difference between student and teaching staff experience of the online learning environment:** whilst 82% of students rated the quality of the online learning environment as good or better, this was only 62% for teaching staff. While the participation rate among teaching staff was too low to be wholly representative in 2022, this shows a significant gap in the experience for a critical component of our community and is supported by results in 2020 where response rates for Teaching Staff met the threshold for 95% confidence:

	2020	2021	2022
Teaching Staff	57%	Not Asked	62%
Students	Not Asked	Not Asked	82%

- **There is strong demand for investment in IT support, upgrading platforms and systems, and specialist software:** when asked 'what would you prefer us to invest in?', the top answer for teaching staff and professional services staff was IT support. For students and researchers, it was upgrading platforms and systems, and specialist software. This was a new question for 2022 so a trend over time is not available.
- **Support for using technology at the University is on a significant downward trend:** For each cohort, there were three questions related to support for using technology at the university, and almost all questions saw a significant downward trend between 2020 and 2022. This could be because demand for support may have significantly increased given the accelerated adoption of technology during this Covid period.

THEME 3: TECHNOLOGY IN YOUR LEARNING/RESEARCH/TEACHING/ROLE

What's going well?

- ✓ **Positive signs for the accessibility of online learning materials:** 83% of students agreed that online learning materials were accessible to them, compared with 78% for RG and 77% for HE. This was a new question for 2022 so a trend over time is not available.
- ✓ **Students generally view the flexibility that online learning offers them as a positive:** 52% of students answered that flexibility was the most positive aspect of online learning. Reasons for this included better comprehension because content can be re-watched, as well as the need to schedule part-time work along their studies. The proportion of students saying flexibility was the most positive aspect of online learning had also increased compared to 2021. There may be various reasons for this, including that positive sentiment towards some of the other perceived benefits in online learning have reduced.

	2020	2021	2022
Students	Not Asked	41%	52%

- ✓ **Some improvement in Wi-Fi access:** for all cohorts, the % of respondents saying that poor wi-fi had been a problem to their learning / research / teaching / work had reduced over the past two years.

	Students	Teaching Staff	Researchers	PS Staff
2021	67%	54%	48%	38%
2022	57%	41%	44%	30%
Change	-10%	-13%	-4%	-8%

Where could there be improvements?

- ✓ **Students and teaching staff shared several concerns about the effectiveness of online T&L:** for students, this included concerns such as a loss of community, a lack of engagement and motivation, it not enabling them to contribute in ways they prefer, and not making good progress in their learning. For teaching staff, this included a loss of community, students not making good progress, and not thinking that students are assessed fairly. The questions in this section were new for 2022 so a trend over time is not available.
- **Students and teaching staff expressed several limitations with online T&L:** for students, the most negative aspects of learning online included lack of interaction, de-motivation, and difficult in concentrating. The proportion of students saying these aspects were the most negative all increased compared to 2021. This was offset by a significant improvement in responses related to quality of teaching

	Lack of Interaction	De-motivating	Difficult to concentrate	Teaching
2021	31%	15%	4%	26%
2022	37%	16%	10%	8%
Change	+6%	+1%	+6%	-18%

For teaching staff, the most negative aspects of teaching online included a lack of interaction and disengaged students. Similarly, these had also increased as a % of responses compared to

2020/21. This was offset by improvements in responses related to technology and workload, which possibly reflects the institutional journey through the pandemic.

	Lack of Interaction	Disengaged Students	Technology	Workload
2021	40%	3%	17%	24%
2022	48%	20%	16%	2%
Change	+8%	+17%	-1%	-22%

- **Wi-Fi still seen as the biggest challenge to learning / teaching / working online across all cohorts:** despite improvements since 2021 (see above) the table below outlines the % of respondents saying that wi-fi was a problem for them in 2022:

	Students	Teaching Staff	Researchers	PS Staff
2022	57%	41%	44%	30%

THEME 4: DEVELOPING YOUR DIGITAL SKILLS

What's going well?

- ✓ **There is a significant improvement in how students view the University's support for their digital skills:** for example, there has been a c.12% increase in agreement that the support the University provides them to learn online is good or better (from 57% in 2021 to 69% in 2022). This is better than the RG average (65%) and HE average (66%). Similarly there has been a c.11% increase in agreement to "Your organisation provides you with guidance about the digital skills you need for your course" (from 40% in 2021 to 51% in 2022).

- ✓ **There is a significant increase in students and staff (all cohorts) using 'Online videos and resources' when requiring help:** the proportion of respondents saying they use online videos and resources when requiring help are as follows:

	Students	Teaching Staff	Researchers	PS Staff
2021	44%	67%	67%	67%
2022	53%	81%	74%	80%
Change	+9%	+14%	+7%	+13%

- ✓ **Opportunities for students to assess their digital skills has returned to the level seen pre-pandemic:** the proportion of students saying they have been provided with the chance to assess their digital skills (e.g. for career planning) is as follows:

	2020	2021	2022
Students	31%	23%	32%

Where could there be improvements?

- **There is a significant reduction in how teaching staff, researchers and professional services staff view the University's support of their digital skills overall:** for example, agreement that the support the University provides them to teach and work online is good or better is down by 4% for teaching staff, 11% for researchers and 14% for professional services staff.

	Teaching Staff	Researchers	PS Staff
2021	52%	72%	78%
2022	48%	61%	64%
Change	-4%	-11%	-14%

- **The number one thing that all cohorts want is more training, guidance and support for developing their digital skills:** when asked 'what one thing should we do to help you learn / teach / work effectively online?', the most common response for all cohorts related to training and support. There appears to be universal demand across the University for support to develop digital skills. This has changed compared to 2020/21. For example, in 2020/21 the most popular responses from students were "communication" and "session delivery; for teaching staff it was "time" and "IT systems"; and for Researchers and PS staff it was IT systems.
- **For the vast majority of digital skills, fewer than 50% of students and staff (all cohorts) believe they have been offered training and support:** for each cohort, c.10 digital skills were listed to the question, 'This academic year, which of the following have we offered you support or training to develop?' and for most skills the responses were below 50%

Appendix: Acknowledgements

The planning and implementation of the Digital Experience Insights (DEI) surveys is supported by a team of dedicated staff and students across the institution who form membership of the DEI Working Group. The work of the group has included designing the UoN supplementary questions for inclusion, stakeholder engagement, publicity and promotion, data dashboard creation, significance testing, open text comment coding and commentary, and data analysis. The full membership, including this paper's authors are:

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