Universities and colleges embrace digital strategy for higher education

Universities and colleges are using new technology to interact more with students outside the lecture hall, according to the latest review of Wales’s digital strategy for higher education.

While the strategy originally focused on how technology could enhance a student’s course, universities have increased their use of technology outside the classroom as well as inside.

The updated strategy also highlights the importance of improving skills and being ‘digitally literate’ – using and understanding information presented using a range of technologies -- which encourages staff and students to use and choose their resources confidently and creatively.

The impact of the strategy so far shows how technology plays a substantial role in the student experience:

- Swansea University has used interactive 3D computer-generated models to teach human anatomy.

- Cardiff Metropolitan University uses blogs and online questionnaires to reflect and act on peer and tutor feedback and for self-assessment.
• Aberystwyth University uses the Blackboard virtual learning environment to engage with students inside and outside the classroom, and to redesign modules creatively.

• OU Anywhere allows students to download digital versions of Open University textbooks, DVDs and CDs.

• The University of South Wales has reported two million downloads of its resources by users worldwide – one of which led to a Hollywood screenwriter producing an original script for a radio drama for students.

• The Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol’s Y Porth - a platform for delivering and managing Welsh medium provision - hosts educational resources in a wide range of subject areas, many of which are open access and available to users beyond the higher education sector.

• Grŵp Llandrillo Menai uses technology to embed video clips for teaching and learning on its Foundation Degree Deaf Studies programme.

Dr David Blaney, Chief Executive of HEFCW said: “The publication of the strategy six years ago has inspired digital developments at universities and colleges. It has encouraged people within institutions to collaborate on course design and helped practitioners share good practice around Wales. Institutions are also using technology creatively in other aspects of a student’s journey through higher education and beyond.

“We can see clear evidence of the positive impact this strategy has had on higher education in Wales. The various innovations demonstrate how technology is benefiting all aspects of campus life and helping to redefine student engagement.”
Dr Cliona O’Neill, Head of Student Experience at HEFCW, said: “Our strategy is no longer just about how students use technology to learn. Universities are increasingly developing creative ways of engaging with students for feedback on their experience more generally.

“Students are used to technology playing a part in their daily lives, from the routine to the creative; a single university identity card might now double as a key or charge card; they might tailor their entire experiences through inventive use of interactive Whiteboards or Virtual Learning environments.

“Reviewing the strategy periodically to make sure it keeps apace with new technologies has given us great insight into how Welsh universities and colleges have really become digital innovators, with a great deal to showcase.”

Martyn Harrow chief executive Jisc: “Jisc has been actively involved in supporting the strategy since its inception. We have been delighted to have the opportunity to work with HEFCW, sector representatives and other organisations to ensure that the strategy remains advantageous to the work of Welsh higher education institutions. Working with customers and sector bodies in this way helps us to ensure that our services continue to be aligned to customer needs.

“We understand the importance of digital opportunities and support to students, and how technology can enhance learning. We are pleased to see that the strategy continues to encourage universities and colleges to take advantage of Jisc support and expertise as they seek to offer an excellent digital student experience.”
The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales – HEFCW – distributes resources for higher education (HE) provided by the Welsh Government.

This includes:

- the tuition fee grant for Welsh domiciled and EU full-time undergraduates
- teaching, research and other funding to Welsh universities
- HE courses at further education colleges.

HEFCW also supports the HE system in Wales in delivering Welsh Government priorities and accredits providers of initial teacher training for school teachers.
Jisc offers digital services and solutions for UK education and research. The charity does this to achieve its vision for the UK to be the most digitally advanced education and research nation in the world.

Working together across the higher education, further education and skills sectors, Jisc provides trusted advice and support, reduces sector costs across shared network, digital content, IT services and procurement negotiations, ensuring the sector stays ahead of the game with research and development for the future.

Find out more at www.jisc.ac.uk or contact the press team on press@jisc.ac.uk