



Digifest 2021



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The eLearning team took some time out last week to visit Digifest 21. It was very different to last year when we managed to attend in person, our virtual visit was over four days rather than two, and we could cover a lot more with sessions being recorded for review. Each day had a central theme:

- Reframing the student experience
- Tomorrow's technology in today's education
- Digital leadership
- Culture and resilience

Weaving through all days were ideas of accessibility, inclusion, wellbeing and digital capabilities.

Angela writes...

Attending the talks over the four days was a reminder to me about how similar experiences have been across the sector, of how we, as a college, responded to the pandemic, and the wealth of resources available to us. On the first day, I took the opportunity to catch up with Amy Hollier as she spoke about sustainable approaches to embedded blended learning in the curriculum. Although this approach may be new to some teachers, the [BLC](#) and other online resources need not be a 'remote only' activity.

Of course, changes driven by the pivot to online teaching very much dominated the four days, but a recurrent theme was using lessons learned to drive forward the use of edTech in colleges to support the student journey. A lot of talks centered around the digital divide and how we tackle digital poverty. I was particularly interested in the keynote talk by Priya

Lakhani on day two, and the work of [Century](#) in metric-driven individualized learning.

On the final day, Scott Hayden shared some strategies developed in their college and other institutions for supporting students while working online. He highlighted some brilliant apps you can share with students, or use yourself.

- [SixPillars](#) self-esteem
- [MyLife](#) mindfulness
- [Forest](#) digital activity monitor (I love this!)
- [Youper](#) self-guided therapy app

If you want to get a further flavour of the conference you can catch up with keynote speaker interviews via the [Edufuturist podcasts](#).

Kat writes...

On day one I attended a session hosted by Jisc on the [FE/HE Student Digital Experience Insights Survey](#) they ran for 2020/21. This highlighted areas such as student digital skills, and their positive and negative feedback of online learning.

Positive aspects of online learning:

- Lecture recordings make a big difference to students with understanding and catching up if unable to attend live lessons
- Live sessions are naturally more interactive and engaging because they more easily allow opportunities to ask questions and receive timely responses
- Feeling more in control of own learning - improved independent study skills, research, and time management
- Easy and convenient to access learning resources, materials, and information

Negative aspects of online learning:

- Technical issues - connectivity... and breaks in connectivity, Wi-Fi, bandwidth, lagging

- Online learning is hard and can be overwhelming - students report receiving too much work, the expectation of a larger volume of independent work than usual, but without the benefit of timely support
- The learning experience and design - lectures can be unengaging, learners are finding it hard to concentrate, particularly when lessons are long and not interactive
- Study environment - not all learners like learning from home
- Well-being and mental health - long sessions make learners tired - they struggle to concentrate, experience screen fatigue, get sore eyes and headaches. Some cite mental health issues from being online

Suggestions from FE learners:

- Make online learning more interactive and enjoyable for students - completing tasks and workbooks rather than reading from textbooks
- Split online lessons into smaller tasks instead of one big task the whole lesson
- Make online learning lessons more intimate by making them smaller

On day four I attended a talk called **What's next for accessibility and inclusion: getting it right for students**

Key takeaways

- Compliance with the new accessibility regulations has helped us recognise in education that the majority of access issues disabled students face are human-related, not technology-related - such as staff not creating accessible documents, and providing closed captions and transcripts for videos
- A big issue for disabled students with online learning is the disparity between provisions, modules, and lecturers. Students are finding they have to choose between what course they enroll on based on how accessible it is to them
- The key thing colleges can do is building awareness and confidence on accessibility among staff to build an accessible future
- Focus on embedding these principles into curriculum design as well, students should learn how to create accessible content too!

For more information on accessibility, you can visit our [Accessibility Page](#) or contact Kat Purdy