

# THETA

The Higher Education Technology Agenda

## Perception and Reality: Student IT and Digital Literacy Skills in the Digital Age

Information technology and digital literacy skills are an increasingly important factor in student success within higher education. As the technical landscape, range of devices and information sources available become increasingly complex, universities must ensure students can navigate and utilise online systems and services successfully. However, little is typically known about students' digital skills when they enter university and institutions seldom explicitly state what skills are expected and how they might be gained by students. Effective digital literacy skills are important beyond student life with employers expecting a high level of digital competency when new graduates enter the workplace and universities regularly cite 'technologically literate' as a key graduate attribute. So how do Universities explain what is expected given the requirements may be broad and constantly changing? How do students know what skills they need and how to get them? In any case, the ability for students (and we might argue, for staff) to learn how to successfully operate a new platform, skill, tool or device is essential. The majority of the students entering universities today may feel they are digitally competent, but to what extent are they digitally literate in the way Universities need and expect?

This presentation will explore how many (but not all) students may feel confident with digital platforms, skills, tools or devices but that their competence in digital literacy, digital behaviours and digital communities may not match their perceived technological abilities. Student data collected between 2006 and 2014 through The University of Western Australia (UWA) Networking Online to Diversify Engagement (NODE) Survey will be used to demonstrate students' perception of their skills in various areas.

This presentation will also highlight the approach taken to the development of student digital skills at UWA. A digital skills strategy, framework, diagnostic and a range of self-help services will be showcased.

The presentation will also provide an overview of the approaches taken by universities in Australia and overseas, benchmarking the approach taken at UWA in the context of the

broader environment. At UWA a collaborative approach to the development of student digital skills is in place with Librarians working with Learning Skills Advisors and Information Technologists to ensure the development and delivery of a framework which has an emphasis on self-help. The presentation will emphasise the benefits of this approach. Finally the presentation will reflect on lessons learnt to date and plans for further development.

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