
Increasing engagement with digital resources

Top tips and useful links

Why is this issue important?

- Libraries and learning resource centres provide essential services to support learning, teaching and research. They manage resources and spaces which are both digital and physical. Organisations which invest in their library services are keen to ensure those resources are well used.
- Learners need to be able to connect easily with digital resources at point of need, whether on campus, in the workplace or on the move.
- Digital learning resources have to compete for the attention of busy learners and staff, so one-shot, one-way communications from the library are unlikely to be enough to embed resources into practice. Collaboration between librarians and others - teachers, senior managers and students - is key.
- Minimising barriers to digital resources can support efforts to improve services for those with disabilities and contribute to a widening access agenda.
- As colleges and universities move towards a more digital curriculum, there is opportunity to review ways to increase engagement with digital resources and library services within a digitally capable organisation.

How to use this guide

This briefing provides a selection of tips and useful links, particularly aimed at librarians and learning resources managers but also of interest to other managers and teachers. Using seven broad headings it includes basic suggestions to help those new to the field as well as more innovative ideas for the more experienced. Many have been sourced from college libraries which have achieved strong uptake of digital resources, particularly the Jisc E-books for FE service. As such they may be particularly apt for colleges but could also be adapted for other contexts.

Top tips

Understand and align with changing needs

1. Understand the drivers and barriers your learners and staff face in adopting digital resources or library services. Find out what we've learned from the community on our Jisc **Digital Student** project, for example the **FE snapshot case studies**.
2. You can use the **resources** from our Digital Student project in your own discussions with students/staff.
3. Take into account accessibility needs from the outset to ensure resources are usable regardless of any disability (or none). See useful links at the end of this guide.
4. Be prepared to challenge perceptions. Some, e.g. adult learners, may have outdated expectations of a library service and may not realise they can access digital resources and services off-campus.
5. Consider whether any groups will require amended opening hours to enable use of your resources (for example your HE students or others who don't have easy access to the web off campus).
6. Use any opportunities to ask learners what they need. Asking a few quick questions in the café can provide ideas that would be hard to obtain from surveys. Consider small rewards such as coffee vouchers.
7. Align your plans with your organisational strategies for learning and teaching, digital development etc.

Collaborate with teachers

8. Teachers are vital to good uptake of digital resources and word-of-mouth recommendation is particularly valuable.
9. Go to where staff are: staff meetings, classrooms, coffee areas. Take resources and tablets along to create a 'pop up' library. Highlight how resources will benefit their subject and save time/effort.
10. Work with teachers to identify resources/titles which are directly relevant to the course and link to them from online reading lists, VLE materials, course handbooks etc.
11. Contact teachers when a new course is being planned to highlight relevant resources into the curriculum
12. Make early contact with new staff and help ensure that digital resources become part of their routine.
13. Involve teachers in trials, renewals and cancellation decisions where possible.
14. Manage expectations of teachers. For example, the process to get e-books into place for a class may be more complex than when an individual orders a personal copy.
15. Where possible identify and reward 'champions' or advocates (including learners where possible).
16. Make use of any feedback received from inspectors or verifiers.
17. Well-managed, selective reading lists can be a key route to engagement for many student groups.

Simplify resource discovery and access

18. Have links to key resources at multiple access points where learners will come across them, for example your VLE and your college app if you have one. Make sure you have a record of where resources are promoted so you can update when necessary.
19. Work with IT staff to minimise the number of clicks needed to get to your resources from the home page.
20. Ensure you import records for your e-resources into your library catalogue but be prepared for the fact that many users will not use it as their primary route to discovery.
21. When writing descriptions of digital resources, make them user-focussed (e.g. what the resource will enable them to do, rather than a list of statistics about what it contains).
22. Many libraries, particularly in higher education, are introducing search facilities which offer a more Google-like experience than the traditional library catalogue. These search tools should be evaluated carefully to ensure they cover the right resources and provide search results which your users will be able to interpret to meet their needs.
23. Increasing availability of campus wifi provides a great opportunity to promote access to resources.
24. Support off-campus access by implementing federated access management, e.g. using Shibboleth or OpenAthens. See our [UK Access Management Federation](#) page for an introduction.
25. Make sure you're offering mobile-friendly options where possible.
26. If introducing tablet devices on loan, use the opportunity to promote digital resources at the same time.

Enable the digital literacy of learners and staff

27. Libraries and learning resource centres often provide classroom sessions on how to find, evaluate and reference resources, including online resources. This is sometimes called information literacy but can also be referred to as study skills, research skills etc. These skills are a vital part of digital literacy.
28. Don't load too much digital resources information into induction time. Aim for a friendly welcome to the service at induction but aim to schedule sessions on digital resources at times in the year when learners will be more able to make use of services for their assignments.
29. Don't expect learners to take up a wide range of resources initially. Build good habits around engagement with the core texts and build on this.
30. Use a variety of teaching strategies when promoting digital resources.
31. Look at ways to offer teaching materials online as refreshers/revision material, for example short screencasts or videos.
32. Ensure your front-line staff develop the confidence and skills to handle basic support queries and share enthusiasm for your digital resources.

Use a wide range of promotional techniques

33. Use clear, concise messages, simple language and avoid library jargon.
34. Make online resources visible in physical spaces, for example QR codes on shelves.
35. Look for fun angles and fascinating facts to spice up your communications around digital resources. Many academic libraries use animal brand mascots to help get their message across.
36. Use cover images where available to promote e-books in your catalogue or VLE. These may be available through suppliers. Some libraries have used [LibraryThing for Libraries](#) to enhance their catalogue.
37. If learners and teachers in a subject area like one resource, use that as a springboard to get them interested in something new on the principle of "If you loved x, you may also like y".
38. Build up a supply of images of your service which you can use to illustrate good news stories on your organisation's website or blog, to raise awareness of your digital resources.
39. Find out any social media channels your staff and students are more likely to engage with.
40. Use induction sessions to raise awareness of your service but don't expect students to retain detailed information at that stage. Where possible integrate digital resources instruction into meaningful activities/assignments at a later stage in the course.
41. Give your digital library a physical presence – consider holding 'open house' in the learning resource centre/library with coffee and cake to show off a new resource.
42. Taken advantage of campus-wide campaigns or nationwide events on high-profile topics to draw people in and show off your resources? Many colleges use events like the Reading Challenge or Safer Internet Day as a platform to promote their library services.
43. Make use of any offers from vendors to provide demonstrations or promotional materials.

Make effective use of data

44. Collect and analyse relevant data. Solutions may include: obtaining data from vendors, spreadsheets shared via the [E-BOOKS-FOR-FE](#) list, or using the [Journal Usage Statistics Portal](#) (JUSP).
45. Combine usage data with other forms of intelligence to communicate success stories to stakeholders and inform resource planning decisions.
46. Allow sufficient time to plan engagement and gauge usage of a resource, starting with the initial buy in of staff through to promotion to students throughout the course (including resits). It may take more than one year to see real impact as staff build the resource into their curriculum.
47. Don't be afraid to review the digital resources you provide from time to time, if you have clear evidence to suggest that they are not delivering good value for your users. You may find the Boston matrix a

useful tool for weighing up the pros and cons of your resources. It's one of the **prioritisation** tools in our guide **Managing strategic activity**.

Network and collaborate

48. Where you have gaps in your digital resources provision you may be able to increase your range through collaboration. For example, some colleges work with their local public library service. Learners receive a public library card on enrolment, giving them to access to additional digital and print resources. This enables the college to focus on the highest priority resources.
49. Stay in touch with your peers doing similar work in other organisations. Even if you can't attend meetings in person there are opportunities to tap into professional networks using Jiscmail lists such as LIS-LINK, free webinars such as those of UKSG, and Twitter.
50. Make sure you're up to date with all the resources available to you from Jisc, as well as any changes to existing agreements. Your Jisc account manager will help you ensure you are making the most of our digital resources products and services.

Useful links

You may wish to use the selected links below to explore further some of the ideas in this briefing. Some are to Jisc services and project resources while others are to third-party sites.

Digital resources toolkits and handbooks

The **NSW.net e-resources toolkit** aims to help public libraries in New South Wales to “promote and maximise their use of e-resources”. You may be able to adapt their ideas for your own situation.

The e-resources management handbook published by **UKSG**. Though some details are now dated, many of the principles on increasing engagement are still sound.

The **Community How To** site from **Tinder Foundation** suggests digital tools which can support community engagement. Many of them could be applied in an education context.

The **American Library Association** (ALA) offers **advocacy** resources and advice. Though much of the material is aimed at US libraries, it can be used to spark ideas to support resources uptake in UK education. See for example **The engaged library: Chicago stories of community building**.

The learning context

The evolution of FELTAG: a glimpse at effective practice in UK further education and skills. This report presents snapshots of blended learning in a range of colleges. It may be helpful to consider how your digital library might fit with similar scenarios in your own organisation.

Digital student – our project resources are great for understanding the expectations and needs of the learner in a digital environment, with resources to help you discuss these issues with your users.

Developing students’ digital literacy

Stay up to date with Jisc digital resources

Jisc digital resources – links to all our digital resources and library services including **Jisc Collections**

Jiscmail lists are used to update our members on agreements and services e.g.

- **JISC-COLLECTIONS-CONSORTIUM** – updates on all Jisc Collections agreements
- **E-BOOKS-FOR-FE** – updates and discussion on E-books-for-FE and other Jisc collections for FE
- **HE-IN-FE** – updates on Jisc collections for HE-in-FE
- **HAIRDRESSING** – updates on the Jisc Hairdressing Training service

Resource discovery

Jisc quick guide [Make your digital resources easier to discover](#)

Usage data

[JUSP](#) (Journal Usage Statistics Portal)

Access management

Find out how the [UK Access Management Federation](#) can reduce barriers to access.

Marketing

Ned Potter's *Library marketing toolkit* has 4 chapters available as open access. For details see his [website](#).

Working strategically

[Enhancing the student digital experience: a strategic approach](#)

The Jisc guide [Managing strategic activity](#) includes a very useful section on [prioritisation](#).

Accessibility and inclusion for all

[Getting started with accessibility and inclusion](#) (quick guide)

[Jisc support for accessible library services](#) (blog post)

Networking and collaboration

[UKSG](#) provides reduced-price membership for colleges, runs webinars on e-resources management and makes its journal [Insights](#) available as an open access publication.

[CoLRiC](#) is a membership organisation for learning resources services which offers a peer evaluation scheme.

[CILIP Information Literacy Group](#) is good for ideas and resources on teaching the skills of finding and using information and resources (including digital resources).

[CILIP MMIT Group](#) focusses on media in libraries including video and graphic forms. It has a useful [blog](#).

The [Change agents network](#) is a great source of ideas and peer support on working with students in partnership.

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Have a question or a comment?

Please get in touch if you would like further advice on this topic or if you have any comments or feedback please get in touch.

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