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# Jisc change agents' network

## Case study

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### London Metropolitan University gets Clued up!

#### Digital skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

London Metropolitan University (London Met) serves over 16,000 students at their two London campuses and a further 3,500 studying on collaborative courses overseas. The diversity of the student body is a strong feature at London Met with 56% of UK students being from black and ethnic minority backgrounds and 42% of UK students being over 25 years of age (source: London Metropolitan University Annual Report and Accounts 2013-2014).

**Clued Up!** is an online resource accompanied by a series of free workshops designed to support students both at London Met and in the wider Higher Education (HE) community to help develop their ability to use digital technologies for study and learning and to develop the digital graduate attributes that they need. The resource offers structured advice, guidance and resources on eight main areas of digital literacy skills divided into **two strands – digital identity and digital learning**. Clued up! is a collaborative project between London Met's Centre for Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT) and Information Systems and Services (ISS) with active participation and support from a team of student **Digital Ambassadors**.

#### How Clued up! came about

The idea behind Clued up! originated from research into the student experience and the widely held perception that students were not entirely comfortable in using technology for learning and academic purposes. Working in partnership, Jim Petteward, Blended Learning Facilitator in the CELT team and Chris O'Reilly, Educational Technologist and University Teaching Fellow from the ISS team at London Met set out to test commonly held perceptions, starting with a series of student interviews and questionnaires at freshers' fairs.

They wanted to test and explore three assumptions, in order to identify to what extent they tallied with student experience at the university:

1. Students often lack fluency in digital technologies in academic or professional contexts
2. Some digital literacies are generic and generally applicable across subject areas, while others are more subject specific
3. Where possible, situational development of digital literacies in subject areas and curricula is better than a 'one size fits all' approach

The interviews revealed a wide differentiation in: awareness of the role of technology in academic learning; the technologies used; and in comfort and awareness of what is meant by the term 'digital literacy'.

*"One of the first things we learned as a Digital Ambassador was to try to transform the term 'digital literacy' into a non-academic term as it became obvious that it was going to be difficult to get students to understand what it meant."*

Helen Long'a Tongu, Student and Digital Ambassador, London Metropolitan University.

Some of the interviews were filmed and feature as resources on the [Clued up! website](#).

While the initial focus was on developing student digital literacies, the close involvement of those working on the project with the staff-facing CELT highlighted the fact that staff digital literacy skills, both in their personal and professional lives, were extremely varied. Some staff and students were unaware of technologies that others took for granted and it became clear that both students and staff needed support and development. Clued up! therefore presented an opportunity to explore an integrated and collaborative solution.

## Digital Ambassadors

The university has a team of student ambassadors and, adopting a similar approach, the project team secured a small amount of funding to enable them to establish a pilot group of eight **Digital Ambassadors** and to offer each of them a bursary of up to £200 to support the Clued up! initiative for an initial three months. The funding enabled the ambassadors to attend weekly meetings, help with the development of materials and workshop plans and assist in the delivery of the series of three free workshops, each of which ran twice (one on North campus and one on City campus).

When recruiting Digital Ambassadors it was made clear that they didn't already need to have achieved a set level of digital literacy in order to become an ambassador, and that they would receive support to grow into the role. The idea was that each week the ambassadors would work with the project team to learn more about different digital tools and explore how these related to their different subject disciplines.

*"As Digital Ambassadors we were able to contribute to the workshop programmes, providing more insight into the student perspective. Working with the project team gave us the confidence to develop our ideas further."*

Helen Long'a Tongu, Student and Digital Ambassador, London Metropolitan University.

## Making it happen

The Clued up! website provides a structured and comprehensive information point for students on how to use technology effectively in their learning. The resources and advice focus on two key areas of digital literacy:

- » Digital Identity - what students need to know about creating and managing their online profile, staying safe online, understanding what others can see about them online and developing a more professional online identity as they move towards graduation.
- » Digital learning - how to take advantage of digital tools and technologies to become a more effective learner. These resources encourage students to look at their own digital practices and develop lifelong learning skills by understanding and engaging with new technologies.

Each area is broken down into four sections:

#### Your digital identity

- » Find yourself online
- » Smarten up your digital profile
- » Be digitally literate
- » Stay safe online

#### Digital study skills

- » Manage your studies online
- » Smarter searching
- » Making referencing easy
- » Build your learning network

## Reflecting back on the Clued up! experience so far

This first phase of Clued up! has been a fairly small-scale pilot which has been driven by a small core team to 'test the water'. It has been developed with minimal resources and work is now underway to explore ways of scaling it up and to identify funding to take the initiative further.

The collaborative nature of Clued up! facilitates the growth and exchange of digital literacies between students who may have a certain level of digital capability in terms of knowing how to access and use certain tools and devices and the staff who, in a given subject area, know and understand the practices, domain and context but may be less sure of how digital interventions relate to and can support teaching and learning.

*"Combining the **digital bravery** (R Sharpe and G Benfield) of the students with staff knowledge and expertise of a given domain can allow you to critically investigate digital practice in a subject."*

Jim Pettiward, Blended Learning Facilitator Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT), London Metropolitan University.

Digital Ambassadors have gained an appreciation of just how broad a term digital literacy can be and have a wider understanding of the differences between subject disciplines.

*"Each Digital Ambassador came from a different subject discipline, used different tools and had individual preferences as to how they used those tools. This meant that we were able to cater for the needs of students from a variety of faculties and every student went away from the workshops with something of relevance to them."*

Helen Long'a Tongu, Student and Digital Ambassador, London Metropolitan University.

The project leaders found it interesting to talk to students about what they needed and wanted and to understand how this was sometimes different to what was expected. For example, not all students were keen on the idea of e-portfolios or publishing their work online as they were concerned about protecting their intellectual property rights and copyright.

## Emerging impact

Evidence so far is anecdotal. Those who have participated either as Digital Ambassadors or in the workshops say they have benefitted and are using a wider variety of tools. Potential new Digital Ambassadors have also come forward to express an interest in taking part in the next iteration. At this stage, proof of concept and a working model has been established that can be more vigorously analysed and monitored as the initiative moves forward.

## Looking to the future

Recognising that students tend to take the lead from their subject tutors and programme staff, the Clued up! team would like to work more closely with academic staff to increase engagement and embed digital literacy skills within subject areas. Proof of success could be evidenced by changes in curricula and the extent to which staff are able to embed new activities and support into their programmes of study.

The programme team would like Digital Ambassadors to receive tangible recognition for their involvement in the project and to allow them greater freedom to design and deliver the workshop series.

Some of the lessons learned and guidance from the Clued up! team so far includes:

- Getting students and staff together to see how they can both develop is a more powerful approach than 'coming to the table' with a deficit skills model.
- Securing buy-in and funding before starting an initiative such as Clued up! will help you to plan more coherently in general and specifically to plan for scaling up and dissemination.
- Timing is critical – there are times in the academic year when students are not available and so the window of opportunity is relatively short. The funding, training and resources need to be aligned to make the best use of the time Digital Ambassadors can devote to the initiative.
- Involve other teams and services such as library teams, student services, the student union and careers staff to build a coalition of stakeholders to take the initiative forward.
- Collaborating with staff in other institutions working to address similar issues is helpful and motivating.

*"I would like Clued up! to be something that every student can experience and for it to be better embedded into course structures. Digital skills will become ever more important and are another aspect of employability skills that need to be developed. If I had known in my first year half of the tools that I now know I could have done better."*

Helen Long'a Tongu, Student and Digital Ambassador, London Metropolitan University.

## Find out more

For further information on Clued up! please visit the web site at <http://learning.londonmet.ac.uk/epacks/digital-literacies/>

Contact: Jim Pettiward ([J.Pettiward@londonmet.ac.uk](mailto:J.Pettiward@londonmet.ac.uk)).

You can also find out more about Jisc's work through the [change agent network](#) and see the [recording of the webinar featuring Clued up!](#) with Jim Pettiward and Helen Long'a Tongu as part of the [Jisc change agent network webinar series](#).