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Article

Get the Digital Edge: a digital literacy and employability skills day for students

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1. Introduction

Project DigitISE was a JISC funded project, running from June 2012 to July 2013, exploring digital literacy in our students (University of Westminster 2013a). At the University of Westminster we have traditionally found that take up for library skills sessions was relatively low compared to the branded IT sessions. Therefore, we wanted to explore further our students' understanding of digital skills, how they relate to employability and how we might market our sessions more effectively. The three main aims of the project were to:

- Explore student attitudes to, and take up of, technology, the skills required to use it effectively and the relevance of these skills to their employability;
- Explore what messages are effective in persuading students of the relevance of the full range of digital literacy skills for employability;
- Integrate the delivery of such skills through multidisciplinary teams.

The Project was overseen by a Board, which included the Deputy Vice Chancellor. The authors of this report were part of the Delivery Group responsible for planning the digital literacy skills sessions.

2. Preparation

The Delivery Group decided to hold a one day conference in March 2013. We thought it would be a good way both to promote the DigitISE project and offer students the chance to attend digital skills sessions. Responsibility for sessions was divided out between delivery group members. Their work involved finding an appropriate speaker and inviting them to attend. The day was marketed as 'Get the Digital Edge' because our findings from the project's focus groups had shown that students already thought they had digital literacy skills and we therefore wanted to imply they would gain something extra. We used Eventbrite to manage bookings.

3. On the day

Students were given a lanyard and pen which featured the link to the 'Get the Digital Edge' web page (University of Westminster 2013b). 150 students had signed up in advance but unfortunately many of those did not show on the day. However as the registration desk was placed prominently near to the campus entrance, we recruited additional students on the day. We found that once a student had attended one session they tended then to stay for additional workshops. We had 100 attendances on the day, with some people attending more than one session. The sessions, each lasting 30 minutes, were:

- Using social media to job hunt;
- Researching companies online for your job interview;
- Social media and reputation: what you can learn from big companies;
- Learning from media change;
- IT training opportunities at the University of Westminster;
- Managing your online reputation.

To conclude the day there was a plenary session where a panel, which included the University's Student Union President, a Director of Teaching and Learning, and the Deputy Vice Chancellor, discussed the themes of the day.

The speakers for each session were allocated a member of the delivery group who looked after them on the day and also introduced their session. Each session was recorded, with the speakers' permission, and these videos were subsequently made available from the 'Get the Digital Edge' web page. A sample of attendees were filmed giving their reaction to the day and describing what they had learnt, and this video of student views was also added to the web page.

4. Future plans and lesson learned

During the panel discussion, students gave feedback that they wanted a simpler one-stop shop for information about, and access to, digital training. Going forward, the project team aims to work with the University Careers and Student Services to create a hub of information on the University web pages which will include useful resources and details of training across the University. We have also created some guidance for students on using social media which will be included as part of this resource. It was clear from the event that digital literacy training needs to be better marketed and/or embedded into courses. These findings are going to be taken forward in a University initiative called Learning Futures, which is considering what our students' learning experience will look like in 10-15 years' time.

References

University of Westminster, 2013a. *DigitISE project blog.* [Online]. Available at: http://blog.westminster.ac.uk/jisc-employability [Accessed: 24 November 2013].

University of Westminster, 2013b. *Get the Digital Edge.* [Online]. Available at: http://www.westminster.ac.uk/digital-edge [Accessed: 24 November 2013].