

Techniques for Gathering Student Views of their Experiences at University

A Report from the LEaD Project

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Executive Summary

The **Learners' Experiences across the Discipline** (LEaD) project was part-funded by JISC as one of the Learner Experiences of e-Learning Phase 2 projects within the e-Learning pedagogy programme. This report describes and discusses the research methodology used in the project. The data obtained together with the findings, conclusions and recommendations are described in detail in the accompanying report *ICT* & the Student First Year Experience.

The LEaD project looked at the student year through students' own voices. Its focus was on "critical moments"; the involvement and impact of learning technologies on students' transition to university and how their use of learning technologies changes as they progress through their first year. The research was conducted across three academic departments, the Schools of Divinity, Physics and Astronomy, and Veterinary Medicine, at the University of Edinburgh. Staff in all of these disciplines have significant experience in using learning technologies in innovative ways to encourage and support greater self-responsibility for learning, and these initiatives provided an ideal opportunity to study the student perspective in more detail.

The research methodology was based on two underlying principles. Firstly, that it is important to take a **learner-centred** approach, whereby the student's own views and opinions are central to the study. Secondly, to adopt a **holistic** approach in which students' use of e-learning is set within the context of their learning experiences as a whole. To this end, self-recorded reflective student diaries were one of the key instruments for data collection.

The use of reflective diaries for educational research, and in particular the use of video diaries, has not been widely reported in the literature. In this project, students could choose to record video diaries at a place and time that suited them using a webcam, a technique that proved to be reasonably straightforward to implement for most students, although problematic for some. Students were asked to complete a minimum of six reflective diaries over the year based around themes and trigger points chosen to reflect significant study-related events. Video diaries proved to be a powerful tool for engaging with students, eliciting detailed information and capturing thoughts and opinions spontaneously rather than through the lens of hindsight.

Data obtained from this approach was triangulated with qualitative and quantitative data obtained by several complementary methods:

Surveys, conducted at the start of the year across all new undergraduate students (online and by paper), and at the end of the year by participating students from the target disciplines (online only).

Reflective diaries, recorded as video, audio or text at key points over the course of the academic year by participating students.

Focus groups, with inter-disciplinary groups of participating students plus a control group selected from other academic disciplines.

Ongoing one to one email and face to face interviews regarding emergent findings

Introduction

This report describes the methodology used in the Learners Experiences across the Discipline (LEaD) project, and offers some pointers for future research using similar approaches. The work undertaken during the project is described in detail in the accompanying report *ICT & the Student First Year Experience*.

The LEaD project recorded the student year through learners' own voices. It captured the "critical moments"; students' expectations and experiences of using technology as they made the transition to university, and how this changed as they progressed through their first year.

The key research questions addressed by the project were:

- To look at "**critical moments**" for first year undergraduate students across a range of disciplines as they make the transition to university life
- To identify students' **expectations** regarding the availability and use of learning technologies at university.
- To understand how their use of learning technology **changes** as they progress through their first year.
- To consider how students adapt and change their **approaches** to e-learning during their first year.
- To identify the key factors that influence students' choices of e-learning **strategies** and how these are utilised.
- To look at the extent to which students use **non institutional** online technologies to support their learning.

The project was a study of first-year students at the University of Edinburgh. Three subject areas, Divinity, Physics and Veterinary Medicine, were chosen to represent a cross-section of the wide range of disciplines available at the University. Organisationally, they sit within each of the three colleges that form the basis of the academic structure of the University: the Colleges of Humanities and Social Sciences; Science and Engineering; and Medicine and Veterinary Medicine. Academic teaching staff in all three subjects have wide ranging experience in the innovative use of learning technology in their courses to encourage and support greater self-responsibility for learning. This goes beyond the "putting course notes in the VLE" approach which is now routine practice for most courses. Hence, to some extent the courses in this study may be considered atypical, however it is because of their strengths in elearning that this was an ideal time to study the student perspective.

- **Divinity.** The first year cohort in Divinity includes a wide age profile from school leavers to mature returnees, providing a population with highly variable IT literacy levels and engagement with modern technology. E-learning uptake by the academic staff ranges from no engagement to those using a rich blended approach where e-learning, including the use of Web 2.0 technologies (weblogs and podcasts), is an integral part of the teaching programme.
- **Physics.** Physics students tend to arrive with high levels of IT literacy, some having been previously users of Web 2.0 technologies. Within this discipline at Edinburgh, e-learning has been used to support face to face teaching on campus for almost a decade, with recent excursions into Web 2.0 territory, using podcasts and wikis to support teaching and learning.
- Veterinary Medicine. Veterinary students are typically high achieving, highly motivated individuals. The traditional Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine & Surgery degree is a 5 year programme, however from session 2006/07 a 4-year graduate entry programme has also been

offered which provides for a markedly different student cohort with widely varying experiences and backgrounds. All students have access to the school VLE "EEVeC" (the Edinburgh Electronic Veterinary Curriculum), embedded within which are a number of resources under the umbrella of the "Virtual Veterinary Practice". The resources include RSS feeds and webcams, and podcasts are under development. E-assessment is being piloted in selected courses and an e-portfolio is also due to be trialled. Individual teachers and courses vary in the extent to which they use these resources.

The report is organised as follows. The following section considers the ethical issues that needed to be addressed at the outset of the project. Methods of data collection and related issues including triangulation and data management are described, followed by a discussion of student recruitment and retention. The report concludes with a look at some of the successes and challenges, together with the lessons learned and some pointers for future research using similar approaches.

Ethical Issues

It is essential to obtain ethical approval as early as possible, so that data collection can proceed without any delays. Ethical approval for this study was granted by the University of Edinburgh School of Education Ethics Committee prior to the start of the project. Level 2 clearance was requested, which covers:

"novel procedures or the use of atypical participant groups – usually projects in which ethical issues might require more detailed consideration but which were unlikely to prove problematic."

British Educational Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines were followed (BERA, 2004). In our application we said that the research would be expected to benefit the participants because:

- The project may lead to a rethinking of university services at the University of Edinburgh.
- As a consequence of reflecting and talking about their learning the students may gain an increased insight into their studies.
- The project is expected to provide course organisers with a better understanding of the way that students use e-learning resources, in turn leading to better informed course evaluation and enhanced course design.

It was also noted that, to compensate them for their efforts, participants would be paid a modest sum to maintain their interest and to reduce drop out, and that face to face sessions were to be arranged at a convenient time and place from the students' point of view, and that refreshments would be provided. We anticipated that students would come from a range of ethnic backgrounds and we stated in our application that all of our participants would be treated with the same care, respect and sensitivity.

One important point is that we felt that those in a **teacher** relationship to the participants should not have access to the identifiable data. For this reason, staff in the participating Schools of Physics, Divinity and Veterinary Medicine were excluded from processing the data, with responsibility for data collection, anonymisation and storage resting with staff from the School of Education. This was made explicit to the students in the information sheet given to them asking for written consent (See Appendix 1 and Appendix 2).Video data which could not be anonymised was to be reviewed and if necessary edited by the School of Education before being released to the project team, although in the end this proved unnecessary. Audio and video material was handled carefully within the School of Education, and subsequent rounds of consent by the students were obtained, ensuring that they were aware of its intended use at all times. The students were made aware that they could request their material to be withdrawn at any time.

After the end of the project, data files, including audio and video files, were to be stored on a secure central University of Edinburgh server to which only the Project team had access. Materials are to be reviewed three years beyond the end of the project to decide which files need to be retained for their long term interest, and which will be deleted. All data will be stored digitally. All participants will be alerted to LEaD Project reports and other publications when they become public.

Tools and Techniques for Data Collection

Triangulation and multimethod approaches

With such diverse student cohorts, we could not hope to represent the whole range of student experiences within this study. Instead, our aim was to obtain a representative cross-section of student views and opinions using a range of data collection techniques. The overall shape of the research approach was based on two underlying principles advocated previously in the Learner Experience Phase 1 studies by Sharpe (2005) and Mayes (2006). Firstly, that it is important to take a **learner-centred** approach, whereby the learners' own views and opinions are central to the study. Secondly, to adopt a **holistic** approach in which learners' use of e-learning is set within the context of their learning experiences as a whole. Most of the courses taken by the students in this study include a significant component of traditional face-to-face teaching supplemented and enhanced by the use of online resources. Hence, the extent to which students engage with online resources may be determined, at least in part, by the preferences of the individual learner rather than being imposed on them by the delivery media used for the course. A course-centric approach, may not, for example, take into account the use of non-institutional or personal technologies in support of learning.

To capture the breadth and complexity of learners' experiences, rather than evaluating only their online behaviour, we used a mixed-mode approach (Aspden & Helm, 2004). This included an institution-wide survey at the start of the year, a series of reflective diaries recorded by students in the three target disciplines, a number of focus groups, an end of year survey and a final feedback survey of participating students. An outline of the various activities undertaken over the course of the study, including the diary themes and trigger points, are summarised in Table 1. The underlying rationale for each of these approaches, together with implementation details and some of the practicalities and pitfalls, are discussed in the following sections.

Timeline	Theme	Trigger	Approach	Participating groups	Number of participants
Before arrival	Prior experience and expectations	Welcome pack	Initial survey (online)	All new undergraduates	17
Induction					
	Prior experience and expectations	Arrival at university	Initial survey (paper)	All new undergraduates	1,345
Semester	1			• •	
Early	First impressions	Arrival, start of taught courses	1st diary entry (video, audio, text or paper)	Participating students (from target disciplines)	24 (7–9 per discipline)
Middle	Assessment and feedback	First assessed assignment	2nd diary entry	Participating students	24 (7–9 per discipline)
Late	Preparation for exams	End of first courses First exams	3rd diary entry	Participating students	24 (7–9 per discipline)
End	Sanity check: comparison between disciplines	End of semester 1 courses	Focus group (face to face)	Inter-disciplinary target + other disciplines	30 (4 groups of 6–8 per group)
Semester 2	2				
Early	Looking back, looking forward:	Start of new courses	4th diary entry	Participating students	24 (7–9 per discipline)
Middle	Exams revisited	First exam marks returned	5th diary entry	Participating students	24 (7–9 per discipline)
Late	Advice for next year's students	End of first year courses	6th diary entry	Participating students	24 (7–9 per discipline)
End	Changes over the year	End of first year courses	Final survey survey (online)	Participating students	24 (7–9 per discipline)
End	Feedback on participating in project	End of first year	Feedback survey (online)	Participating students	24 (7–9 per discipline)
Summer b	oreak				
	Subject-specific reflections	End of project	Comments (email)	Staff from target disciplines	3 (1 per discipline)

Table 1 Summary of data collection methods

Surveys

The surveys used tried and tested questions from previous research whenever possible. Where new questions were developed, pilots were conducted where possible. Survey questionnaires and focus group questions were also circulated amongst the research team members before being finalised.

Start of year survey

An institution-wide survey of new undergraduate students' use of IT was conducted at enrolment. The aims of the survey were twofold. Firstly, it formed part of a long-running longitudinal study by the University of Edinburgh on students' prior experience with, and expectations of, IT for teaching and learning (Macleod et al., 2002, Haywood et al., 2004). To facilitate comparison with data collected in previous years, the questions were based on these previous surveys together with a small number of additional questions specific to the current study. Secondly, it was used to gather baseline information for the current work. One beneficial side-effect was that it also provided a very effective vehicle for recruiting students to the project, particularly when it was administered in-person rather than online.

An online version of the survey was made available to all new undergraduate students via a URL included in the joining pack, sent in paper form to all new students prior to registration. Students interested in participating could indicate this on the form. The number of students who completed the online survey was very low (only 17 replies were received by this route). This is consistent with the low online return rate obtained previously (Haywood et al., 2004). To compensate, the same survey was distributed by hand in paper format during Fresher's week and the first two weeks of term. With only limited effort available, we could not hope to reach all new students in person, therefore a number of representative disciplines from across the University were targeted. Administering the survey in person at induction talks or early lectures was particularly effective, but surveys were also distributed and collected at IT support sessions and various induction and students' association events with the help of academic and support staff and members of the EUSA, the Edinburgh University Students' Association.

The questions for the initial survey are in Appendix 3.

End of year survey

A short end of year survey was created and delivered online to participating students only. This survey was intended to complement the initial survey, by eliciting both quantitative and qualitative information on students' perceptions of change and transition over the year. The response rate for this survey was 100%, presumably because it was directed at a committed and motivated target group. It was also made easily accessed by an email with a clickable URL. Those who did not respond were sent a reminder follow up email. Completion was strongly encouraged and final payment was conditional on completion.

The questions for the end of year survey are in Appendix 4.

Feedback survey

At the completion of the year, students were asked to complete a short feedback survey. This was an opportunity for students to reflect on what they had learned and gained from participation in the project, and for us to gain valuable feedback that will be used to inform future projects.

The questions for the feedback survey are in Appendix 5.

All of the online surveys were built and deployed using the Bristol Online Survey (BOS) service. Information was collected from paper surveys by electronic scanning. Survey data were analysed using MS Excel and SPSS.

Reflective Diaries

Structure and choice of medium

Video was chosen as the preferred medium for the reflective diaries, primarily because it has the potential to provide a rich source of information that cannot be fully captured via audio or text diaries. It also builds on and extends the audio diaries approach used by Conole et al. (2006). The value of video over other media has been expressed by Noyes (2004), who, referring to the use of video diaries to explore school children's learning, states:

"The first thing that struck me when watching the recording of their entries was the increased depth of their comments...their video responses were somehow far more compelling."

Participating students were asked to record reflective diaries at key points through their first academic year. Each diary covered a time period of approximately 2 weeks and had a particular theme. The themes were linked to key points in the students' academic studies, for example the first assessed coursework. The timeline for the diaries and the themes are summarised in Table 1. Guidance on the scope and content of the diaries was provided by means of a set of questions in a *Diary Information Sheet* (see Appendix 8), which also included practical details on recording and submitting diaries, key dates etc. The diaries themselves were relatively freeform and unstructured, and students were encouraged to add other comments if they chose.

Students were strongly encouraged to record at least one diary entry as a video. However, there was no compulsion, and students were free to choose how to record their diaries and by what method to deliver them to the project team. This was particularly important to ensure that people who were uncomfortable recording videos or who were not technically confident were not excluded, as this would have the potential to bias the data. An example of this was a non-native English speaker who preferred using written text to recording a video On the other hand, for some students video was preferred to text for example a student with dyslexia who found video or audio better suited to meet his needs. Choices of medium included video, audio, handwritten, word processed and email. All the diaries were recorded by the students with no-one from the project team present.

The diary return methods chosen by our students are summarised in Appendix 6

Video diaries: some practicalities

Video and audio diaries were recorded using a webcam, either the student's own or one provided by the project (in some cases they were shared between students). At the start of the project a number of methods for recording and submitting video diaries were piloted by student volunteers. Based on this, it was decided to use webcams. This method was found to be straightforward; the webcams were easy to use and, importantly, were portable, hence enabling students to record diaries at a time and location of their own choosing.

Based on the pilot study, a short help-sheet was written with guidance on recording and uploading diaries. In practice, even students who did not consider themselves to be technically-minded found the webcams easy to set up and use. Despite the notes a few students had problems adjusting the video window for a suitable setting or recording good quality audio. In retrospect advice to make a short test video before each diary would have helped. Students were also given the opportunity to record their diaries in a central, quiet venue, the *LEaD Diary Room*. These were regular drop-in sessions where students who did not have access to a webcam or felt their technical skills were not adequate, could

come along to record their diary in private, while one of the project team was on hand at these sessions to answer any questions or simply chat.

The original intention had been to ask students to upload their video diaries directly to a central repository such as a VLE or wiki. However, the pilot study showed this to be problematic, due mainly to the large file sizes involved. For example, most of the University and departmental systems impose a file upload limit, typically between 2 and 10 MB. Even a short (3-5 min) talking head video may be considerably larger than this; most were between 10 and 20 MB, although some were significantly larger. A range of technical options were explored, for example compressing video files before upload or using an FTP service. However, all of these approaches required a level of technical competence and confidence that some students may not have possessed, and it was important that this group was not excluded from participating in the study. Video sharing sites such as YouTube were not considered to be suitable for data protection reasons. Ultimately, a "low-tech" approach was chosen: students were provided with labelled CDs for their video diaries together with pre-addressed envelopes for returning diary entries, for example via the University internal post. Submitting diaries on CD worked surprisingly well from both the students' and the investigators' perspective. In practice, video diaries were returned by both internal and external mail, and personal hand in. Uploading to an external file sharing site was suggested and used by students who had returned to their home institution overseas at the later stages of the project but who were keen to continue participating, although this required us to obtain an account at a suitable video sharing site.

Focus Groups

To stimulate and guide the discussion during the focus group sessions, our approach was informed by elements of the "Interview Plus" methodology (Sharpe, 2005, Mayes, 2006 and Creanor, 2006), which advocates the use of some activity or artefact to guide recall and aid thinking. Mayes (2006) and Creanor (2006) also utilised Interview Plus in the context of an Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) (Reid, 2005), which starts from the premise that "the experts in learner experience are the learners" (LEX, 2006). We did not directly follow this approach. The first year at university is a time of significant adjustment in many students' approaches to learning, which may include periods of confusion and self-doubt. Although we firmly believe that the learners' voice should take centre-stage, it is less clear that at this stage in their academic career students are indeed experts in their own learning.

Four in-person focus group sessions were held towards the end of the first semester. All of the focus groups were cross-disciplinary, with six to eight students per group. Rather than exploring in detail individual students' experiences, the focus groups were used to explore more general themes that had been identified from the reflective diaries. These were presented to the group either in the form of short scenarios or as short illustrative diary extracts.

Three groups were composed of participating students, with Physics, Divinity and Veterinary Medicine represented in each group. These focus group sessions used scenarios based in part on some of the themes and questions emerging from the early reflective diaries, including:

- Expectations of university in general & IT in particular.
- Penny-dropping ("eureka") moments.
- The student of the future.

The fourth group was composed of students from other disciplines, selected mainly from those who had completed the initial survey. This group included students who had not used computers at school or who had low technical skills, as well as others who were highly confident. The aim was to use this group as a "sanity check" for findings emerging from the reflective diaries. This was done by basing the discussion around selected anonymised diary extracts, grouped under the broad themes of

Expectations, Transitions and Uses of Technology. They were also asked about surprises that had emerged from the initial survey data and their answers helped to clarify ambiguities for the investigators.

The original plan had been to set up online discussion groups in the second semester, to complement the focus groups in the first semester. This was not pursued for two main reasons. Firstly, the retention rate for the reflective diaries was 100% over the whole year, hence a significant quantity of high quality data was collected by this route. Secondly, one of the rationales for setting up an online forum had been to help foster a sense of community and identity amongst participating students. In practice this turned out not to be necessary, as this sense of community was achieved by a variety of other approaches. These are discussed in more detail in the section "Student Recruitment and Retention".

The scenarios and diary extracts used in the focus groups are in Appendix 7.

Data sampling and management

To obtain a proportionate balance of educational qualifications and achievement, age, gender and, crucially, level of technological expertise, student groups were selected using a form of stratified random sampling, stratified by academic discipline. In a study of this size we could not sample all of the degree programmes offered by the University, therefore it was also important to assess how representational the students in our target groups were of the whole first year cohort. We tackled this issue by a variety of methods.

- Registry data was collected with demographic details of all first year students. We were then able to view our students "nested" both in their class and also in the whole first year intake.
- Using previous University-wide intake/Freshers questionnaires, responses to the initial survey were compared with data gathered in previous years.
- We tried to make it comfortable for the student to "tell us their story" in an uninhibited way, with the reassurance that there would be no repercussions. Our approach was to suggest that they shared the ownership of the project.
- A fourth focus group comprising students from other disciplines (Education, History, Biology, Informatics, Classics, Social Science, and Languages) was used to explore ideas that had emerged to date. They acted as a wider-based sounding board for emerging ideas from the various triangulated sources, fed in useful new ideas or confirmed or refuted the commonality of experiences.
- To ensure that the information from individual students was reliable we triangulated our approaches, acquiring data from a variety of sources.
- Students' assessment grades were collected and compared to the mean grade for the class. .
- We checked postings made by our students on their discussion boards and compared them to the class activity.
- Towards the end of the project staff from the target disciplines were asked to comment on their experience of their subject area/discipline.
- On the recommendation of JISC, an Advisory Group (including the University of Edinburgh Student Union (EUSA) and the Scottish Funding Council) was set up to keep oversight on the progress of the project, to make suggestions for future activities and act as a "reality check".
- We were also conscious of other studies both in the JISC initiative and elsewhere which added to our knowledge base and provided comparative data.

Quantitative survey data were managed and analysed using SPSS, with some summary charts created using Excel. Prior to data sharing within the team the student names and numbers were removed and replaced by ID codes. The data from all the surveys, demographic data, diary submissions etc were brought together into a single SPSS file to enable longitudinal analyses.

Initial analyses of a sample of the first batches of qualitative data from the surveys, reflective diaries and focus groups were undertaken by reading/viewing, taking notes and then discussing and comparing findings amongst the research team. This approach was chosen because it was very important to get an early indication of both the emerging themes and the quality and scope of the data so that these could be fed back into the later data gathering stages. From these discussions, a coding framework was devised that was then applied in the subsequent more formal analyses. The qualitative data were very rich and pragmatic decisions had to be taken as to which aspects of the data were to be analysed in depth and which left for later interrogation.

Qualitative data were organised, managed and analysed using NVivo 8 (which was released in March 2008) as it can be used to handle audio and video data in addition to text. The overall scheme used for organising the data within NVivo 8 is shown in Figure 1. Attributes for each student, such as demographic information, courses taken, assessment results etc., were stored in cases. Diary entries, survey data and focus group information were arranged in separate folders, to facilitate cross-cutting analysis at a particular point in time. All of the data pertaining to individual students were grouped into sets, with one set per student. This enabled us to analyse each student over time. Video and audio diaries were analysed directly and were not fully transcribed, although selected diary extracts were transcribed where this was considered to he helpful. The rather factual nature of the video diaries meant that they could be coded without full transcription. Despite the introduction of audio and video handling features in NVivo 8, the plain text or Word diaries were much easier to work with, as the software's search and retrieval capability with rich media files, and even transcription elements of such files proved to be quite limited.

At all stages of the data analysis a "constant comparison" approach was adopted. The project team met frequently to analyse the (anonymised) data, agree on standards and update the coding framework. Each team member was provided with a complete copy of the data for analysis of their allotted items. The separate copies of the NVivo project files were periodically merged in order to maintain a single "golden" copy which could be redistributed for further analysis.

To prevent slippage or loss of focus there were regular project meetings, frequent email updates and clearly defined goals. This was especially important as team members were distributed among different schools and physical locations across the University. In addition, there were hard deadlines involving windows of opportunity to collect data, together with variations in the subject area timetables, a careful record was kept of dates. Team members were aware that they had to act with speed at certain points in the year.



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Student Recruitment and Retention

It was very important to engage with students as early as possible so that they could record their initial thoughts and experiences while they were still fresh in their minds. To facilitate this, introductory presentations on the project were included as part of the Fresher's week induction sessions for each of the target disciplines. There was also an opportunity for students to express an interest in the project in the initial survey (see Appendix 3). Interested students were invited to attend an informal follow-up session at which the project was explained in detail. Students who agreed to participate were asked to read the information sheet and then sign the consent form and were then provided with an information pack which included information sheets, blank CDs and return envelopes and, if necessary, a webcam.

Student recruitment at the start of the year and retention over the whole of the academic year were vital to the success of the study and considerable time effort was expended in this area. Our approaches included:

- **Involvement of academic staff.** Academic teaching staff were directly involved at all stages of the project; their role was crucial. Together with significant expertise in deploying and utilising e-learning in their disciplines, they had a major "advocacy" role in encouraging students to engage with the project and provide useful information. This direct contact with academic teaching staff both affirmed the importance of the research and linked it directly to the quality of course delivery.
- **Rewards and benefits.** Direct rewards ranged from providing refreshments at information and focus group sessions etc., through to offering financial incentives paid on a per-semester basis to encourage ongoing participation. Less tangible than but equally significant benefits included providing opportunities for students to:
 - Think about and reflect on the way they study: what works, what doesn't; and how their approaches develop over time.
 - Try out and use new technologies and practice skills that will be useful both for academic life and beyond.
 - Contribute to cutting-edge research and make a real difference to learning and teaching for themselves and future students
- Being "part of something". Various approaches were used to foster a sense of identity and community: The project officer was key in this respect, acting as a central point of contact for all participants; the diary room offered a concrete demonstration of the team's support and encouragement; and the project identity was reinforced by using the project logo on notices, information packs, website etc. Mediation and stimulation by both academic and project staff also created a strong image of care and ownership. This was an important factor in maintaining students' engagement over the course of the year.
- Flexibility of approach. This is exemplified by the fact that although students were encouraged to record a video diary, they were free to choose an alternative format if preferred we were keen to emphasise to participants that the message was more important than the medium. The drop-in diary rooms provide another example, as by scheduling relatively long sessions (typically all afternoon plus occasional evenings) we could accommodate individual students' timetables.

Conclusions: Successes and Challenges

From the outset, this project presented a number of methodological challenges. The use of reflective diaries, and in particular video diaries, was largely untested. The ability to collect high quality data was critically dependent on both recruiting students very early on and retaining them over the course of the whole year. There were multiple hard deadlines set by key points in the academic calendar. The project was multi-disciplinary, acting across all of the academic Colleges and relevant Support Services within the University, and relied heavily on close collaboration between all members of the project team. These challenges and the ways they were resolved have been discussed in detail at several points in this report; here we present a summary of the various issues that arose over the course of the project, together with their resolution and some additional comments "*For the future*" which offer pointers to researchers considering the use of similar research approaches.

- **Poor uptake of online survey.** This was resolved by widespread distribution of the survey in paper form (see "Start of year survey").
 - *For the future:* Advertise links to online surveys as widely as possible but do not assume high take-up. If possible, ensure that completed paper surveys can be scanned electronically. An optical mark reading (OMR) method might be considered, although not everyone will have access to this type of scanning equipment. Plan in detail for distribution and collection of paper surveys; a targeted approach may work best. However, it is important to note that although our first institution-wide survey was largely unsuccessful online, the second online survey received 100% response, because it was directed at a committed and motivated target group and made easily accessed by an email with a URL.
- **Students' availability.** This was resolved by adopting a flexible approach, including attendance at multiple timetabled sessions and setting up "drop-in" sessions (see "Student Recruitment and Retention"). Students who returned overseas were paid using PayPal.
 - *For the future:* This approach worked well, and will be used in similar projects in the future.
- **Technical issues associated with uploading large files**. This was resolved by supplying students with CDs and pre-addressed envelopes (see "Video diaries: some practicalities").
 - *For the future:* Consider possible approaches well in advance, pilot them if possible, and do not underestimate the technical challenges. Watch out for new technologies. If uploading data to an external (i.e. non-institutional) site, it is important to consider any data protection issues.
- Establishing robust data collection techniques. This was resolved by piloting the questionnaires, diary information sheets and collection methods before the start of the semester (see "Video diaries: some practicalities"). Also, being part of a wider JISC initiative facilitated sharing of ideas across projects.
 - *For the future:* Piloting is a very useful step and should be included in project plans wherever practical. Examples from this project include: methods of distributing surveys; wording on questionnaires, methods of making and collecting videos; fact sheets for participants. For example, in the first questionnaire questions 3 and 4 gave examples which, as it turned out, would have been better as tick boxes, as most students either re-wrote these examples or underlined them. However, some students did provide original views so a box for open comments was also required.
- Qualitative analysis tools for video data. This was resolved by the use of NVivo 8. However, the fact that video and audio data was not fully transcribed did make detailed

analysis in the later stages of the project time-consuming and more difficult than it might have been (see "Data sampling and management").

- *For the future*: Consider factoring transcription of audio/video data into the project plan.
- **Permission to use video/audio diaries for dissemination purposes.** This was included in our original submission to the University's Ethics Committee and was approved, but was not included explicitly in the participant consent forms. It was resolved by contacting individual students to seek their permission after the end of the project.
 - *For the future:* Seek Ethics approval for all expected uses of data, and ensure that participant consent forms fully match Ethics approval forms. However, it is always good practice to go back and ask for permission again at the end of the project to reconfirm agreement. Although participants may give ethical approval at the start, they will not know what they have contributed and whether they are still happy for their diaries to be used until the end of the project. Also, it is likely that the ways materials will be used for dissemination activities will not be known in detail until near the end of the project.

In conclusion, from a methodological perspective this project broke new ground and is perhaps best considered as a pilot study. We have learned a great deal along the way, and plan to develop and extend the approaches described here in future projects.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Consent Form

Learner Experiences Across the Disciplines (LEaD) Project Higher & Community Education/Physics/Divinity/Veterinary Medicine University of Edinburgh

CONFIDENTIAL CONSENT FORM

I agree / do not agree to take part in the following activities as part of the LEaD Project research study :

Data	Agree	Do not agree
Academic record and coursework		
Group on-line discussions		
Activities	Agree	Do not agree
Focus groups		
Face to face interviews		
Paper or online surveys		
Telephone or email interviews		
Diaries		

I understand that

- Any access needed to my academic record and coursework will not be used for any grading purpose but solely to enable the research team to understand my learning and the part played by ICT
- access to on-line discussion forums and their equivalents will be solely for the purpose of analysing the types of transactions which take place (eg learning support, academic discussion)
- focus groups will take no longer than one hour. These sessions will be to explore participants' views of their use of ICT within their studies
- interviews will be to collect my views on recent course activities and my studies in greater depth than can be achieved by paper questionnaires. They need take no more than 30 minutes. Personal interviews will take place at a mutually agreed time, date and location to suit my convenience.
- diaries will be designed for me to log my activities and communications with others during my studies. (We are not directly interested in the content of communications but in the media used and the reason for the transactions.) No-one will be asked to complete a diary for more than two continuous weeks and each entry will take only a few minutes.
- surveys will be no more than four A4 pages, or online equivalent, and designed to collect factual and nonsensitive attitudinal information
- my identity will *not* be linked to any data collected, stored, or reported by the Project team.
- I am free to refuse to participate in any or all of the above activities and may withdraw my participation or the data I have contributed at any time by contacting Denise Haywood, the LEaD Project Officer.

Name (please print clearly)

Signed

Date

Please complete and sign this form (whether or not you consent to participate). and return it in the envelope supplied to:

Denise Haywood, LEaD Project Officer, Higher & Community Education, the Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh, Paterson's Land, Holyrood Road, Edinburgh EH8 8AQ

(denise.haywood@ed.ac.uk) Many thanks for your help

Appendix 2 Information Sheet

Information sheet for participants in the 'Learner Experiences across the Disciplines' (LEaD) Project

Invitation to participate in a research project

We are delighted to have received government funding for a research project exploring the experiences of new students at the university as they use a range of information technologies within their undergraduate studies. We will be focussing particularly on the students taking degree courses in Physics, Divinity and Veterinary Medicine.

We would like to invite you to join the other participants who are taking part in this exciting research project.

Purpose and benefits of the LEaD project

This Project will undertake a study of first year students' 'critical moments' when learning technology impacts on a learners' transition to university and of what happens as progression is made through the first year. Students will find a well-established presence online with Web2.0 tools such as weblogs and podcasts embedded in support of teaching of their courses. This Project aims to understand this process of learning and to find ways to support students in their studies.

Your involvement will help to ensure that the information we obtain accurately reflects the experience and views of students. It will also assist in making improvements for the benefit of participants and teaching staff.

What would be expected of you as a participant in the project

On the attached form we have listed the activities we would like you to take part in. We are conscious that your time is precious and we shall not ask you to participate in more activities than absolutely necessary. So as not to take up too much of your time:

- a focus group discussion will take no longer than an hour
- a personal and telephone interview will take no longer than 30 minutes
- paper surveys will be no longer than four pages
- diaries will ask you to very briefly log and summarise the time you spend studying, off-line and online, and to map your learning interactions with other students and your tutors; each set of diary entries will be limited to two weeks of daily entries. If you decide to do this as a video diary you will be provided with the necessary equipment.

In addition, in strictest confidence we should like to have access to your academic record, a sample of your coursework, and any on-line discussion forums in which you participate. We are not interested in the content of your coursework or participation in discussion forums but only in classifying uses of different types of IT. Because you may not have participated in on-line discussion forums before, we would like to make it clear that your participation in them is absolutely independent of your permission for us to observe them. Should you feel that your participation in any forums is affected by knowing that we are observing them, you may withdraw your consent to this independently of any other consent you may have given.

Confidentiality and dissemination of the findings of the study

No names will be attached to any data collected or stored by the Project team.

Our findings will be reported to our government funding body, but no names of respondents will appear in our reports. The course teams, in turn, will use these findings to inform the reports they prepare. Findings will also be summarised in scholarly articles written by the project team members for publication in peer-reviewed academic journals.

Your participation in the study

Should you not wish to participate, you can of course decline to do so, either at the outset, or once the study is underway. In any case, please complete the enclosed consent form and return it as soon as is convenient. We are independent of the course team and there are no implications for you in your role as a participant arising from your decision to join or not join the LEaD Project. Your course tutors will **not** analyse the data but this will be done independently and the information will be kept anonymous at all times.

If you would like any further information, or have any queries about the Project, please get in touch with us on 0131 651 6545, or email Denise.Haywood@ed.ac.uk

LEaD Project Officer, Higher and Community Education, the Moray House School of Education, the University of Edinburgh, Paterson's Land, Holyrood Road, Edinburgh EH8 8AQ.

Appendix 3 Start of Year Survey Questions

Student Uses of Information Technology Survey 2007.

At the University of Edinburgh we have a long-term aim of assisting our students to make the best possible use of computers and the Internet in their studies. To help us to improve our courses, we would like to find out about the IT skills and experiences that you bring with you, and your thoughts about the use of Information & Communications Technology (ICT) in your studies. This year we have received funding from the Government agency JISC (www.jisc.ac.uk) to carry out more in-depth research in this area ('Learner Experiences Across the Disciplines' - "LEaD Project"). It will help us to understand the uses that all newly arriving students make of computers and the Internet as they make the transition into university. We will carry out more detailed studies with students entering the Schools of Physics, Divinity and Veterinary Medicine.

This questionnaire contains 15 questions, is anonymous, and is for research and planning purposes only. However, we would like some of you to become student members of our research team, and if you are interested in getting more information about how you could join us, please enter your matriculation number where requested at the end of the document.

All data are held securely in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act and available only to members of the research team.

Please mark boxes with a cross:

Computers & your studies

1. How confident are you about using computers	very	quite looking	a little	very
and the Internet in your forthcoming university	confident	forward to the	apprehensive	apprehensive
studies? (please mark one option)		challenge		

2. How helpful have you found computers and the Internet to be v for your previous studies? (*please mark one option*)

very helpful helpful not helpful hindrance

Please answer Questions 3 and 4 ONLY if you left school within the last TWO years.

3. In what ways do you think that studying at the University of Edinburgh will be different from studying at your school? (for example, study materials more or less prescribed; more or less groupwork; more or less solo study; more or less formal teaching sessions; more or less need to use the library)

4. How do you think your use of computers and the Internet at the University of Edinburgh will differ in your academic studies from your use at school (for example, more or less use of technology; different software and systems available; more or less use in collaborative groupwork; more or less information or data sources; more or less help available; more or less formal training available)

5. When you come to the University of Edinburgh, will you have a computer of your own, yes no or one for your exclusive use, for your studies?

6. If you answered 'yes' to Question 5 above, is this computer: (please mark one option)		a I	desktop machine	a laptor machine	o I have 1 e deskto lap	I have BOTH a desktop and a laptop	
6a. If you indicated that you will have a laptop, please select those statements which apply to you: (select all that apply)	you plan to carry your laptop to the university campus regularly	your laptop is equipped with wireless (WiFi) capability	you hav experience making use WiFi to con to the Inter	e e of e of inect rnet			
6b. If you will have a desktop or laptop computer, do you intend to connect it to the Internet? (select all that apply)	no	yes; through a private dial-up telephone accoun	yes; throug private broad t connection	gh a Iband on	yes; through a student hall or flat network connection	don't know	
					1		

7. If you will have a computer for your studies at the University of Edinburgh, please indicate your ability to: (*please mark one option per line*)

	I do this type	I would need some help	I have never done	Don't know
	of task alone	to do this type of task	this type of task	/ unsure
backup your work and recreational files				
keep your antivirus software updated				
keep your computer's operating system				
(eg Windows, Mac OS, Linux)updated				

8. Please indicate your ability to use the following computer programs to carry out the specified tasks (like those suggested as examples) (*please mark one option per line*)

99) (F		I do this of task a	type I llone h	would need so elp to do this ty of task	me /pe	I have new done this t of task	ver ype	Don't know / unsure
word processor (a email program (e.g. presentation manage web browser (e.g. to on-line bibliograp search for a s use the Inter demographic inform	e.g. to crea to send an ger (e.g. P sli b look for v do bhic/libran pecific aca net to trac nation (e.g	tte a well-formatted CV or resumé) attached document or image) owerPoint to create des for a short talk) veather forecasts or wnload music files) y database (e.g. to ademic publication) k down statistics or ; researching for an essay)							
9. Which of the following electronic devices do you own? (select all that apply)	an MP3 player	a palm-top computer, or personal digital assistant (PDA)	a mobile phone	a 'smart phone ar upon w example text	t' phone (i.e. lik nd PDA combin /hich you can, t , open and wor documents) or Blackberry	te a a ned, for k on	a digital camera	a USB 1 stick/dr transferr betw comp	nemory tive for ing files veen outers

10. Please indicate the approximate frequency with which you use the following Internet-based services: (*please mark one option per line*)

	on a daily	regularly,	rarely, or	never
	or	but	never	heard of
	weeklv	less		this
	basis	frequently		
downloading music from the Internet for use on an MP3 player				
downloading spoken word material (such as podcasts) for use on				
an MP3 player				
using an instant massaging system (such as Microsoft Messenger				
as ing an instant incessing system (such as interesting in wessenger)				
of Talloo! Wessellger)				
using an internet telephone system (such as Skype, or Project				
GISMO)				
using the web to buy products or services (such as books, music,				
or travel reservations)				
using a "social network" (such as MySpace, Facebook, bebo) to				
maintain contact with people and or share experiences				
using "social recommendation" services (such as 43things,				
TripAdvisor, del.icio.us) to find out more about a particular subject				
or interest				
using "social sharing" sites (such as flickr) to post your photos				
online				
using a webcam to let friends see you whilst speaking on the				
Internet				
making entries in a personal blog				
keeping your appointments in an electronic or online diary				
Now please tell us about yourself				
	50			
11. Age 10-20 21-25 20-30 31-35 36-40 41-50 Over	50		I.	
			т	

12. Gender female male

13. What are (were) you doing in the	At	At	At	Year	working	Full-time	other
year before joining the University of	school	college	university	out		family/caring	
Edinburgh?				(gap		commitments	
(please mark one option)				year)			

If you selected Other, please specify:

14. Please write your main subject of study at the University.

Arts, Culture & Environment Biological Sciences	Informatics Law
Biomedical Sciences	Literatures, Languages & Cultures
Chemistry	Management School & Economics
Clinical Sciences & Community Health	Mathematics
Divinity (New College)	Molecular & Clinical Medicine
Education (Moray House)	Philosophy, Psychology & Language Sciences
Engineering & Electronics	Physics
GeoSciences	Social & Political Studies
Health in Social Science	Veterinary Studies, (Royal (Dick))
History & Classics	Don't know

15. The University School you are enrolling in (please mark one option)

+

Would you like to join our project?

We would like to recruit some student members for our LEaD research project team to help us understand the uses that newly-arriving students make of computers and the Internet, especially as they make the transition into university. Indicating your interest does not commit you in any way to joining us, but enables us to give you more information.

If you would like to find out more, please enter your matriculation number in this box so that we can email your student email account with further information about the project

Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire. Please return it to the person who gave it to you or place it in the box provided.

Edinburgh University contact:

Dr Judy Hardy (LEaD Project Manager) School of Physics, Kings Buildings Edinburgh EH9 3JZ

j.hardy@ed.ac.uk

Appendix 4 End of Year Survey Questions

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LeAD Student Survey of Uses of Information Technology March 2008		
Now you are nearing the end of the academic year we would like to gather some information from you about your uses of IT in your studies in the courses you	u have taken.	
This questionnaire contains 16 questions and should only take a few minutes to complete. The data will be anonymised by Denise Haywood before analysis,	and will be used for LeAD Project p	urposes only.
All data are held securely in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act and available only to members of the research team.		
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First, some questions about yourself.		
Please note that personal information will not be available to anyone other than Denise Haywood.		
1. Your name:		
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Select an answer 💌		
3. Please write the names of the courses (classes) you have taken this year. (Please use one line per course.)		
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Your IT skills		
4. To what extent have you developed new IT (computer & internet) skills since you came to Edinburgh University? [New=did not do this before arriving at	t Edinburgh]	
◯ No new skills		
O A few new skills		
O Several new skills		
Please list/describe briefly the new IT skills you have acquired		
5. To what extent have you extended your IT (computer & internet) skills since you came to Edinburgh University? [Extended = could do this previously	only at a lower skill level]	
O A few IT skills extended		
O Many IT skills extended		
Please list/describe briefly the pre-existing IT skills you extended		
 or what were the main ways in which you acquired new IT skills or extended existing skills? (mark all options that apply) (select all that apply) 		
Family		
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Inversity printed documentation		
University online materials		
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 What were the main ways in which you acquired new IT skills or extended existing skills? (mark all options that apply) (select all that apply) 		
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 To what extent did you have IT skills before you came to Edinburgh University that you have never been called upon to use in your studies? Many IT skills not needed or used A few IT skills not needed or used No IT skills not needed or used 		
If you do have skills from before coming to Edinburgh University that you did not need to use, please describe briefly below:		
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Molei	0	0	0	0			
c. Social networking (eg Eacebook)	0	0		0			
d. Blog (eg blogspot)		0	0	0			
e. Social recommendation (ed del icio us for bookmarks)	0	0	0	0			
f. Social sharing (eq flickr for photos)	0	0	0	0			
. which of these do you use for academic purposes, and why?		Reason					
a. Discussion board/forum							
b. Wiki							
c. Social networking (eg Facebook)							
d. Blog (eg blogspot)							
e. Social recommendation (eg del.icio.us for bookmarks)							
f. Social sharing (eg flickr for photos)							
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00	0	0	0
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ine bibliographic database (Web of Knowledge, Science Citation, ATLA, O	0	0	0
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w frequently have you used the following information sources in your first year at the University of Edinburgh?	? (Mark one option per row)		
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How frequently have you used the following information sources in your first	st year at the University of Edinburgh?	? (Mark one option per row)		
		I used this		
	On a daily or weekly basis	Regularly, but less frequently	Rarely, or never	Never heard of this
Electronic journals	0	0	0	0
Virtual learning environment (WebCT, EeVEC)	0	0	0	0
Wikipedia	0	0	0	0
Online subject encyclopedias (eg Judaica)	0	0	0	0
JSTOR	0	0	0	0
Subject-specialist internet sources (e.g. 'subject gateways' or dedicated oject websites)	0	0	0	0
Other non-subject specialist internet sources	0	0	0	0
Websites at other universities	0	0	0	0
e-books	0	0	0	0
Course handouts	0	0	0	0
Textbooks / books	0	0	0	0
Printed newspapers or magazines	0	0	0	0
. Online newspapers or magazines	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0

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Saved the URL as a bookmark on own PC		
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saved the bookmark with a bibliographic software (e.g. Endnote)		
Used them in social tagging / recommendation sites such as delliciolus		
Saved the UKL or documents in some other structured way		
. When you search for information on the internet, to what extent do you generally feel confident in your assessment of the quality (ie accuracy, e)	freedom from distortion) of the information you fin	nd? (Mark
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Confident		
) Somewhat unconfident		
) Not at all confident		
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Appendix 5 Feedback Survey Questions

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LEaD Final Survey		
This final questionnaire contains 5 questions and should only take a few minutes to complete. The data will be anonymised by Denise Haywood before analys	is, and will be used for LeAD Projec	ct purposes only.
All data are held securely in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act and available only to members of the research team.		
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Please note that personal information will not be available to anyone other than Denise Haywood.		
1. Your name:		
 Which of the following have you gained or learned from your participation in the LEaD Project? (select all that apply) 		
 knowledge that the project outcomes will improve the student experience more understanding of educational research met students from other disciplines felt greater sense of 'belonging' to the University felt greater sense of own ideas being valued gained better understanding of own learning & development due to reflection 		
3. Did you discover or learn anything new from the Project, if so what was this? (Examples might be new software, websites, study tips)		
		H
4. Did you learn any new skills from participation in the Project?		
 Would you like to be kept informed about the Project, for instance when the report is published, other events? 		
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Appendix 6 Diary Return Methods

	Number of returns							
Diary return	1 st	2^{nd}	3 rd	4^{th}	5 th	6 th	All	
method	diary	diary	diary	diary	diary	diary	diaries	
video	14	9	12	4	2	3	44	
audio	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	
text	8	15	10	18	19	19	89	
handwritten	2	0	1	1	1	1	6	
Total	25	25	23	23	22	23	141	

Diary return methods and number of returns

Appendix 7 Focus Group Scenarios and Diary Extracts

Appendix 7A Focus Group Scenario A

Expectations of university in general & IT in particular - "Did it turn out to be what you thought it would be?"

You have been asked for advice by a friend who is applying to the University of Edinburgh 2008. She thinks it will be a fun place to live and that the university will be a good place to study. She thinks she will need to use the library more than she does now, and that there will be lots of technology and formal training, but she will get less help from teaching staff who might be busy with their research and she might need to rely more on family and friends. There might be more solo study and less groupwork.

- Where do you think she gets these ideas from?
- With your experience to date, what will you tell her is important? Tell her about friends you know who went to other universities for comparison.
- How can she prepare for the transition?
- Tell her about anything that surprised you in a good or bad way? Were you faced with something new or something you had not expected?

Appendix 7B Focus Group Scenario B

"Penny-dropping" moments - Things you need to learn to progress.

One of your lecturers needs to get across an idea or concept that he wants you to understand fully but it's hard for you to understand. The knowledge is key to progress and will enable you to grasp what will come next.

- Have you found instances in your course like this?
- What do you consider is the most effective way for you to learn this kind of difficult material? Does IT help you to test your own knowledge or understanding?
- Have you experienced any surprises in the way you learn, eg ways of learning you didn't use before you came to university?

Appendix 7C Focus Group Scenario C

The Student of the Future

In five years time the University of Edinburgh, like all organisations, is adopting new technologies. Mobile phones have become much more advanced than they are today. They are key channels to keeping students informed about coursework, deadlines and changes, and they can be used to read and interact with learning materials of most kinds. Learning and teaching is changing (for both students and staff) as these new technologies are used to enhance quality by enabling learners to access materials and support.

- How different do you think a typical 'day in the life of a student' will be in 5 years time compared to now? In what ways will it differ, in what ways will it be the same?
- Do you think that the social side of learning will be helped by technology ? Will there be a future Facebook or similar systems that universities can adapt and use? What about virtual worlds, games etc?
- How adventurous with technology are you now in your study methods? Do you think technology will enable future students to be more adventurous in their studying or will they feel more prescribed?
- Are there things you would fear for your successors? Ways in which technology might change University life for the worse?

Appendix 7D Themes and diary extracts for fourth focus groups

Expectations

"I've heard there are good electronic sources yet have found myself with enough new information to study in just the hard copy of the lecture notes that are handed out Life is quite different and a little more hectic thus studying has changed as well. I found myself quite often staying in the computer lab in between classes and using the electronic resources."

"Something that I wasn't anticipating on arrival at university would be the amount of time social networking would take up. It seems that by the time I have checked my hotmail email account, yahoo email account, MyEd, university email, facebook and now EEVeC, over half an hour has passed...."

Transitions

"[When I first arrived] I came to the conclusion that my style of learning would have to adapt at university to one which was more centred around the library and books! [but] I accessed EEVeC for the first time yesterday and was delighted to realise I couldn't have been more wrong. Immediately I had a whole world of veterinary technology at my fingertips.."

"Arriving at university has lead me into using the social networking site "Facebook" more and more. The final year students set up a group on facebook for my year and it has enabled me to find, talk to and get an idea about the interests of a large proportion of my year both currently and prior to my arrival."

"Once the bane of my school life, assessment now appears to have been given a purpose - to provide feedback in an environment where it is rather more tricky to judge just how well one is learning"

Uses of technology

"In dissection we take a lot of pictures and it's important to be able to share them with our group, so attaching them to an email and saving them upon receipt is important You can visualise things and concepts a lot better if you can see animations on the web rather than just static pictures in a text book"

"Last week we were given access to an online multiple choice test to assess our knowledge of one of the modules we have been studying this term"

"Spent 6 hours over the weekend getting the online self-teaching assignment done. It was horrible. Bad layout, poor interface, lousy programming...this substantiates my point that online learning just isn't right"

"Oh yes, clickers! Being dragged out of my 9 am reverie to actually think about something.....Dr [xxx] usually gave us a couple of 'times to think' every lecture...they've helped me to realise how the Physics we're taught will be applied"

"We've been asked to do a blog for one of our courses...although I was aware of blogging I had never done it before...I quite enjoyed it"

"During the last few weeks I have been able to post discussion topics, check posts by teachers, look up my timetable and start to explore the virtual farm Students use a Yahoo group that the candidates for the Church of Scotland use to communicate with other students"

Appendix 8 Diary Information Sheet

Recording & uploading diary entries



One of the things that you have been asked to do as a participant in the LEaD project is to keep a diary at various points over the year, to record your thoughts and experiences on studying and learning at University.

Format

We would like you to record at least one diary entry as a video. If you are comfortable with this technique then please continue to use it. Otherwise, you are free to record your diaries using whatever format you prefer – for example as an audio diary, a blog, a text document, by email or simply using pen and paper.

Content

Each diary entry should include:

- Your name
- Your degree programme
- The current date

We are interested to hear all of your opinions on learning and teaching methods at University. However, we'd like you to reflect in particular on the two weeks preceding each diary entry (or for your first entry, on your initial experiences). For this time period, please let us know:

- Approximately how many hours per week you have spent on self-study (i.e. excluding timetabled activities such as lectures, tutorials etc.), both off-line and online.
- What main types of activity you have undertaken in your self-study time.
- Where and when you preferred to study.
- What learning interactions you have had with other students and with your tutors.
- What types of online resources and tools you have used, both University-provided and others. Please be as specific as you can, so that someone not studying on, or associated with, your courses would know what you meant.
- Why you have used these resources and tools.
- What resources or tools you expected to have or would like to have used, but which were not available.
- How the way that you studied was influenced by the use of online resources and tools.
- And in particular please tell us of any major changes you have experienced in any of the above categories since your last entry.

Number and length

Please record a minimum of three diary entries in each semester. We will let you know the dates when these should be done, but broadly speaking it will be at the start, middle and end of the semester. You are, of course, welcome to record more entries than this if you would like.

There is no fixed length for each entry; as guide we suggest around 3 to 5 minutes for video or audio recordings, or about 1/2 to 1 A4 page of text.

Recording video diaries

There are a number of ways that you can record video diaries:

- Come along to the LEaD Diary Room at <insert location> on <insert dates and times>. One of the project team will be on hand at these sessions to explain how to record a video and to answer any other questions that you might have.
- Use a webcam with a PC or laptop. We can supply you with a Webcam if required, but you will need your own computer.
- It may be possible record videos using your mobile phone, however we can't provide support for recording or uploading videos from mobile phones.