

# Student Digital Experience Insights Survey

## Summary report

January 2025

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### What is the digital experience insights survey?

The Digital Experience Insight surveys provided by JISC are [national surveys](#) designed to find out more about the experiences of students studying at UK Universities. A number of universities across the country run these surveys each year. At the University of Reading, our surveys were open to responses during September and October 2024. Your responses will help us to consider how you use digital technologies in your learning, as well as how you engage with key aspects of the digital environment and digital skills provided by the University.

This report, along with a [4-minute summary video](#), highlights the key findings of our survey.

You can also download a transcript of the video.

**NB.** The results of the University of Reading's 2024/25 student survey will be included in the [annual summary report](#) compiled by Jisc in October 2025. It is possible to compare the University of Reading's responses with the 2023/24 annual report, although this does not represent the current year's responses.

## Summary of student responses

All Foundation, Undergraduate, Taught Postgraduate students studying on the Whiteknights and London Road campuses were invited to complete the survey during a 4-week period in Semester 1. Students were sent a link to the survey via social media, email from academic schools, notices on Blackboard and Student Essentials.

226 students from 27 countries responded to the survey (0.9% response rate). These results are a snapshot of the digital experiences of a range of students, but cannot be claimed to be fully representative of the student body.

### Key demographics

#### Gender

Gender*	Percentage of responses
Man	30%
Woman	67%
Non-binary	1%
In another way/prefer not to say	1%

\*This survey received a higher rate of responses from women compared to the general student population (53%).

#### Ethnicity

Ethnicity*	Percentage of responses
Asian	33%
Black	9%
Mixed	6%
White	46%
Other	4%

\*This survey received a higher response rate from BAME students compared to the general student population (38%).

#### Disability and learning differences

Do you have an impairment, health condition or learning difference?*	Percentage of responses
Yes	19%
No	76%
Prefer not to say	5%

\*This survey received a higher response rate from students with disabilities compared to the general student population (16%).

74% of respondents were studying for an undergraduate degree, and 50% had been at Reading for under a year – so they were in the first year of their undergraduate or postgraduate degrees. 73% of students were UK nationals, and 24% were international students.

The majority of responses were received from students in the School of Law (40%) or Henley Business School (22%). Responses were received from all academic schools.

## Use of tool and technologies

Many students (47%) used two devices (laptop, desktop, tablet, smartphone) for learning – usually a laptop and smartphone. 24% used only one device – most of these were laptops, but a small percentage (3%) were relying solely on a smartphone or tablet. Laptop loans and access to 24 hour PC labs on campus will support access to specialist software, or access to devices in general, but these students may require some additional support to access the tools they need.

In addition, 17% of student required financial support to purchase the device they used for learning.

In order to support their studies, many students make use of accessibility and productivity features such as captions, transcripts, mindmapping and planning tools. These tools are used widely by students across the general population, by all user groups.

Most students took part in on-campus teaching, but studied both on- and off-campus; making use of student accommodation, their own homes, workplaces, and public spaces to access learning materials.

When asked about the impact of the cost of living crisis, 40% of students stated that their paid work has impacted on their ability to attend classes or meet assignment deadlines. A third of students have stayed away from campus in order to minimise travel costs, and 29% have studied on campus in order to save money on heating, lighting, or wifi.

International students were asked some additional questions about their digital learning experiences before arriving in the UK:

- 72% reported that they were using digital technologies in their learning every day prior to starting their studies at Reading
- The most common learning activity was accessing learning materials online. Very few students mentioned that the use of digital technologies had not been permitted at their school, and some mentioned that they had taken part in online

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teaching and learning as a result of Covid-19 lockdown measures – which may have meant that some students had more exposure to online teaching and learning as a result of the pandemic

- The majority of international students stated that wifi/mobile data connectivity in the UK was the same or slightly less reliable than in their home country. Jisc data has previously suggested that students' prior use of mobile data vs wifi in their home country may impact on their experience of using eduroam and mobile data in the UK. For some,

## Digital Learning environment: student ratings, issues, and positive and negative aspects of the tools available

86% of students rated the digital learning environment as above average. When asked to mention a very useful digital tool, 44% of students mentioned Blackboard. Students were very positive about accessing learning materials through Blackboard – 87% said that digital technologies were very convenient for their learning and they were able to access the materials that they needed from anywhere and at any time. Students commented that lecture recordings were very helpful in revising, revisiting, or catch up on content that had been missed.

*“The most positive aspect of digital technologies is being able to access various types of information all in one spot. Especially this year, having everything neatly labelled makes studying easier and quicker.”*

*“It allows me to go at my own pace, stop when I need more time to think something through or take notes and easily return to something I need to reinforce”*

However, a number of students also mentioned that a reliance on digital tools impacted their wellbeing. 15% of students stated that they felt they were spending too much time online and found that they were often distracted by their online environment, leading to procrastination or poor time management. Students also reported impacts on their physical health, including concerns around eye strain related to too much screentime.

Some students felt that they were disconnected from their peers and tutors due to the online learning environment, and that they would prefer more face to face interaction, or more engagement from their peers during online sessions.

*“The constant presence of notifications and the temptation to browse social media can easily distract me from my coursework”*

*“Screen time often causes me physical health issues such as eye strain, headaches, and poor posture”*

*“[...] online sessions now, where the tutor is struggling to get people engaged and contributing [...] can feel tiring and lacklustre.”*

Although students found that it was very easy to access their learning materials, only 49% said that the digital learning materials on their course were engaging and motivating. A number of comments related to negative aspects of digital technologies referenced issues accessing resources or requests for more resources – it would be useful to investigate this further with some follow-up questions for students.

The most common issues that students experienced on campus were wifi connectivity issues (67%), lack of a private space to work (46%) and mobile data access (46%). (Students could select more than one response in this section of the survey.)

## Digital skills support and suggestions for future improvements

Only 60% of students were given guidance about the digital skills needed for their course, and only 29% were provided with an assessment of their digital training needs. This is a potential area for improvement – students may benefit from more explicit guidance about the digital skills they are expected to develop as part of their learning, and an assessment tool could support this in future.

75% of students have been offered basic IT skills training and support, and 98% had received support to make the most of online learning. It was also positive to see that 78% of students rated the training that they had received as above average.

However, there is still some room for improvement, and students were asked to suggest improvements to their digital skills training experience. Students reported that they would like more training opportunities and guidance, including suggestions such as dedicated training on specialist software, and a digital skills checklist.

When asked what kinds of training and support materials they would like, the most popular materials were short videos (57%), online webinars (56%) and in person workshops (38%).

49% of students went to their lecturers for digital skills support, and 43% used online resources or asked DTS support. It is therefore important to provide digital skills support and guidance to teaching staff, in order to ensure that they are also up to date and able to support their students.

## Comparison with national reports

Statement	University of Reading data 24/25	UK data 23/24
Supported to use own devices	61%	64%
Support access to online platforms/services off campus	70%	72%

Comfortable with how data was collected and used	<b>48%</b>	44%
Quality of digital learning environment	<b>86%</b>	83%
Engaging and motivating digital learning resources	49%	<b>55%</b>
Use of digital technologies was convenient	<b>87%</b>	82%
Quality of the digital learning on course	81%	<b>83%</b>
Provided with formal recognition, accreditation or certification for digital skills	19%	<b>28%</b>
Support offered to learn effectively using technology	<b>78%</b>	72%

Overall, responses from students at Reading were in line with national responses.

Reports of wifi issues and requests for further investment in upgrading platforms and systems were common across the national responses, and Jisc recommend that universities review their wifi setup guidance in order to improve the experience for students accessing eduroam for the first time.

Students at Reading were more likely to say that they had received guidance on the digital skills needed for their course, but less likely to say that they received recognition for their digital skills in the form of badges or microcredentials.

## What will happen to these results?

These results, along with [staff responses](#), and other [activities](#) carried out as part of the [Digital Capabilities Project](#), will be compiled into a set of recommendations to be reported to University committees at the end of the project timeline in February 2025.

For more information, please contact the [Digital Capabilities Officer](#).

## Where can I get more help with digital skills?

A range of training and support is already provided at the University, and the Digital Capabilities Project has compiled a list of sources of support on the [Student Essentials webpage](#).

For more examples of ‘digital skills’ or ‘digital capabilities’ please visit the [definitions](#) webpage to view existing support and guidance provided by Jisc.

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With thanks to Deirdre McLaughlin (HBS) for her support with the analysis of free text responses to this survey.

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