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## How can Next Generation Digital Learning Environments fulfil the promise of online education?

### Student Dissertation

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## WED: How can Next Generation Digital Learning Environments fulfil the promise of online education? (Elizabeth Ellis)

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This multimedia poster session on the theme of Innovation will ask, 'How can Next Generation Digital Environments embody and execute the promise of online education?' As the higher education sector comes to terms with the idea that there is probably not a single 'solution' to the problems inherent to virtual learning environments (VLEs), the term NGDLE is starting to creep into horizon scanning conversations among learning technologists.

A product of their time, VLEs are increasingly problematic in a more socially networked and digitally confident world. VLEs can often be passive repositories of learning material and grades, guilty of simply putting the offline online, rather than providing immersive personalised learning environments - teaching spaces with their own methods and approaches taking advantage of what the digital world has to offer students.

Now that we are in a Teaching Excellence Framework landscape, how should NGDLEs effectively help students succeed in their academic and professional careers? By providing them with personalised learning experiences and the acquisition of lifelong learning skills (HEFCE, 2016)? Should NGDLEs drive behavioural change in our students and our teaching staff? How can we easily identify the user requirements of an NGDLE?

An ongoing consultation challenge from Jisc poses the question, 'What should the next generation of digital learning environments do?' (Jisc, 2016)

Online learning continues to be highly emotive, with those who use technology to teach online often being accused of trying to delete or diminish the human element of learning. Particularly with learning analytics becoming increasingly more mainstream, and the conflation of learning analytics with personal data and privacy concerns, educational technology is under scrutiny from the academic and student communities.

This session will ask:

- 1) What are NGDLEs?
- 2) What do NGDLEs mean for online education, and what does it require of it?

Cloud created by:



Elizabeth Ellis

9 January 2017

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3) How can NGDLEs be a vehicle for the best parts of online education: the open web, co-creation, student engagement, technology, and digital capability?

4) What does student success look like in an NGDLE?

5) What do NGDLEs signify about innovation in online education?

Even if there is no single technological leap forward with regards to digital learning environments, NGDLEs could represent a disruptive or incremental innovation in online learning and teaching. As we challenge our students to take more ownership through participative learning, as we encourage our students to become more digitally confident and creative, as we provide our students with the tools for deeper engagement with learning materials and new strategies for immersive learning, and as we continue to help them battle with the ongoing curse and joy of collaborative learning, taking an active stance with regard to the development of future digital learning environments can help improve trust between online learning and teaching evangelists and sceptics, and ultimately improve student attainment, progression and retention.

#### References

HEFCE. (2016) 'Teaching Excellence Framework' [Online]. Available at <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/tef/> (last accessed 5 January 2017)

Jisc. (2016) 'What should the next generation of digital learning environments do?' [Online]. Available at <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/rd/get-involved/what-should-the-next-generation-of-digital-learning-environments-do> (last accessed 5 January 2017)

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[Dr Carol Waites](#)

10:12pm 26 January 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hear hear. I run a fully online course and a face to face course where I use Moodle as a repository so I can identify with what you are discussing. I find the online platform engages students more and makes them more reflective and they digest the information and process it better if they complete the course. The course is entirely tutor-led so this encourages their participation and there is a high completion rate. Student success in online courses is a big question. How about the student who reads all the forums and hardly participates - the lurker. This can be a valid role if the person is still gaining confidence and is older and more hesitant. How can we assess this type of participation? This is a question I am asking myself. And many are reluctant to enrol in the online version as they feel they will not succeed. How to give them confidence to give it a go? I look forward to your presentation.



OU H818 'The Networked Practitioner' Online Conference 2017

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[Mary Howell](#)

9:13pm 28 January 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hi Elizabeth

I am interested in that last paragraph - the idea that NGDLE's make learning less human. Here in rural North Yorks I would have little access to, learning with other learners if it were not for online opportunities. For me it makes the human element possible.

The questions that Caarol asks are also in my mind - especially how can we widen the audience for online learning?



[Sarah Adrienne Hughes](#)

12:04pm 29 January 2017 (Edited 12:05pm 29 January 2017) [Permalink](#)

Dear Elizabeth,

NGDLEs...Interesting. How can you provide technical support to learners that do not have the Digital Literacy in the first place? I have embedded WIKIs and other online tools that students and lecturers struggle with already: what are the challenges for teachers/lecturers in supporting a more student led system?

Regards (from a self taught IT champion, who struggles!!!)

Sarah



[Dr Susan Morris](#)

12:01pm 2 February 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hello Elizabeth,

I look forward to your presentation. So many directions that NGDLEs can go - you appear to take for granted that change will happen - there will be incremental or disruptive practice? My question is how does the learner adapt to a landscape where there are so many openings and cul de sacs about online learning? How do they know how to personalise their learning environment for them - especially at levels of sophistication about subjects. We grapple with this in Biology curriculum (OU STEM).

Enjoy the conference experience, Susan



[Allison Bell](#)

8:32pm 2 February 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hi Elizabeth,

While I can't make your live session I will definitely view your recording as this promises to be too good to miss. I like your observation that collaborative learning is both a curse and a joy! And also VLEs "guilty of simply putting the offline online, rather than providing immersive personalised learning environments" - definitely resonate.

I have oftened hoped (dreamed?) to be able to break free from our institutional VLE but there

are very real barriers to this (dependences of admin functions on student activities, submission site, plagiarism software, students' own varied views as to sharing their work publically vs privately, safe spaces etc., to name a few) and another factor is where we have tried to give students access to better tools outside the VLE we have to then be very careful about what personal data is given, where it's stored and how secure it is (not just privacy but whether it's likely to be preserved throughout their studies).. Lots of issues!

Allison



[Elizabeth Ellis](#)

7:41pm 14 February 2017 (Edited 7:42pm 14 February 2017) [Permalink](#)

Hello everyone, I'm so sorry for being slack on responding to your incredibly useful comments and questions.

@Dr Carol Waites: I've been looking at HEFCE's definition of student success in learning environments, as is referenced in the TEF: that student success is essentially evidenced by a student being able to take ownership of their learning, their scholarship, and their professional practice. Not really assessable, but a student could be taking ownership of all these things, and still not post anything to a forum! But assessing engagement is always tricky.

@Mary Howell: I get so cross when people criticise online learning and teaching as being 'less human'. It's not an either/or situation, and if the design of the course and the technology is human centred, and intelligently done, then hopefully that too will widen participation, and make more inclusive learning possible.

@Sarah Adrienne Hughes: A crucial question to which I don't have an answer beyond the wish to see this being championed on an institutional level! And also to say that we are really bad at adjusting workload down when students also need to learn a piece of kit, or a tool. Is it about using tech they're familiar with?

@Dr Susan Morris: I think there are certain aspects to online learning that absolutely have to change, and that may be me taking it for granted, but I don't think we can continue as we are? I think learners don't adapt in a vacuum, any more than staff do. But personalisation seems like a really important step towards having students see value in what we're offering them. I don't think current systems, or even near horizon systems, are nearly sophisticated enough to provide true personalised learning though.

@Allison Bell: Everything you mention is completely legitimate, and not without serious ramifications. But to my mind we can't carry on as we are and expect our students to continue to accept the online education they're getting. I think we can do better! They're all new boundaries to explore and push and hopefully find strategies through.

Really appreciate everyone's comments! It's been so hard to try to fit everything in to 10 minutes and a resource. There's so much to say and so many dependencies!



[Dr Simon Ball](#)

2:45pm 15 February 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hi Liz

Please find below the main questions and comments from your live presentation. It's up to you how to answer them, whether you wish to group them, or whether you wish to point to an

answer already given above, for example.

Best wishes

Simon

- ▶ I think sharing drafts and being open in that way is a highly personal thing and I also found it difficult - one thing this course tells you is that you are rarely alone
- ▶ I wonder if a principle of new platforms should be simplicity and being robust as students are often very time poor and if they cannot access easily you quickly lose them
- ▶ I agree students won't stick with a platform if it's not easy and then 'worth it'
- ▶ I do agree strongly that it has to be linked into curriculum and assessment. Some students will never engage unless they see some direct need to
- ▶ I used a VLE with 6th form students recently - as they are a Facebook/Whatsapp generation they found it clunky - how will NGDLE's exploit the positives of what we have learned from social media?
- ▶ Can you comment on the tension between decentralisation (of access) and focus of online presentation.
- ▶ Some tension there to reduce workload when content is driven by meeting other professional requirements. But do agree strongly
- ▶ Due to security issues many workplaces have started to lock down what employees can access in work and this is having a knock on impact on using the internet to learn in the workplace.
- ▶ I agree that digital literacy is important, and as you say Liz I think there is a trajectory for students in becoming confident and creative
- ▶ That distinction between digital lit and confidence and creativity is a really useful one thank you
- ▶ They may be digitally literate (and surprisingly many are not) but not necessarily when discussing unfamiliar academic content
- ▶ I've also come across the idea of digital fluency - about being able to use what you know in different contexts, e.g. academic, work, social

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