IN-DEPTH CASE STUDIES OF STUDENTS' USE OF TECHNOLOGY TO SUPPORT ASSESSMENT

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A review of over eighty studies which purported to focus on students' experiences of e-learning highlighted some surprising results (Sharpe et al. 2005),[1] finding that few studies actually focused on the student experience. The JISC Learning Experience Project (LXP) is working with four of the HE Academy subject centres[2] to explore students' experiences of technology; with a particular interested in discipline difference in the use of technology for assessment purposes. The primary aim is to distil out subject discipline issues in using e-learning. This is being achieved by: collecting data on students' experiences of using technology to support learning activities, describing the students' personal background and learning context, and drawing out learner beliefs and e-learning strategies. After this initial situated exploration the focus will be turned to a wider set of issues involving learner's experience of both learning and technology and learner's thoughts and believes about their experiences.

Data collection includes an online survey, twenty in-depth case studies (including audio logs, interviews and observation) and focus groups. The research questions include:

- How do learners engage with and experience e-learning?
    - What is their perception of e-learning?
    - What do e-learners do when they are learning with technology?
- What strategies do e-learners use and what is effective?
- How does e-learning relate to and contribute to the whole learning experience?
- How do learners manage to fit e-learning around their traditional learning activities?

An important part of the study is to explore how students are using technologies to support their assessment activities; both in terms of creating assignments and undertaking online formative and summative assessment. We are interested in exploring the subject discipline differences in the types of assessment and the ways in which it is used. Evidence suggests that there

[1] Sharpe, R., Benfield, G., Lessner, E., & DeCicco, E. (2005) Final report: Scoping study for the pedagogy strand of the JISC learning programme. Unpublished internal report v.4.1 JISC.
[2] Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Medicine, Economics, Information and Computer Sciences and Languages and linguistics

are fundamental subject disciplines in the key characteristics of learning which impacts significantly on modes of assessments undertaken. For example a recent symposium highlighted the importance of communication in the Social Science, problem-based learning in Sciences and team work in Health Sciences.[3]

The paper will draw out the findings from the LXP study in relation to students' use of technologies for assessment. Initial analysis of early data from the study shows that students are conscious of both the benefits and disadvantages of e-assessment as the following quote illustrates:

> "*My experience is that it [e-assessment] certainly helps with formative assessment so that one can test oneself against different parts of the curriculum. The downsides include lack of personal feedback so that you don't necessarily know that what you are studying is what you should be studying.*"

The paper will draw out the key findings from the study in relation to e-assessment and use these as a basis for making recommendations for more effective e-assessment across different subject disciplines.

[3] HE Academy/JISC symposium – 9th February 2006, http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/eLDisciplines.htm