



PTAS Project Report (for SMALL PROJECT GRANTS)

Project Title: Exploring and engaging with student perceptions of digital citizenship

Principal Investigator: Dr Vicki Madden
School / Department: Information Services Group (ISG)

Team members: Dr Louise Connelly (Dick Vet School), Dr Melissa Highton (ISG)

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Grant recipients are expected to submit a brief report at the conclusion of their project which outlines briefly the following: nature of work completed; outcomes; benefits to student learning/student experience; dissemination activity (where relevant – actual and planned) and how the activity could inform future work or be transferred to other subject areas in the University. The brief report will be published on the IAD web pages.

Brief Report (maximum 500 words)

What did you do?

We carried out a small pilot project comprising eight interviews with students and six interviews with staff, intending to gauge perceptions of digital citizenship and the significance of this topic within higher education. After conducting a literature review into the current state of research on this topic, we developed a series of 21 questions forming a semi-structured interview. We anticipate further interviews may be conducted in future.

Our initial literature review also aided in the creation of two openly licensed videos on digital citizenship, "[what is digital citizenship?](#)" and "[digital citizenship for educators and students](#)," which were added to both the University's [Digital Footprint MOOC](#) as well as the [Digital Safety and Citizenship web hub](#).

What did you find out?

This small pilot project has been instrumental in showing that further research into this topic is required. As the sample size of this project was small, it has been difficult to identify trends in student behaviours and learning needs but what is most evident from our interviews with staff and students is that there is a thorough lack of understanding and discussion surrounding digital citizenship at the University. Especially given the University Strategy 2030's emphasis on the themes of 'people' and 'social and civic responsibility,' this topic must be better embedded in the University curriculum but our research indicates this is far from the case. Students and staff have extremely different perceptions of and engagement with digital citizenship depending on their backgrounds, identities and level of digital literacy but nearly all student participants reported a lack of University support for this topic.

How did you disseminate your findings?

Research findings were presented at the AdvanceHE Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Conference in Manchester (March 2022) and the University of Edinburgh Learning and Teaching Conference



(June 2022). Interest in our research project was especially strong at the AdvanceHE Conference, which generated fruitful discussion and opportunities for cross-institutional collaboration.

The short talk presentation given at the Learning and Teaching Conference was recorded by conference staff and disseminated through the conference website, while an additional recording of this talk will shortly be uploaded as a resource on the Digital Safety and Citizenship Web Hub.

Research from this PTAS project has also fed into the following work:

- Digital Safety Steering Group, comprising staff and students from a range of University departments. This study feeds into policy work undertaken by steering group members.
 - Vet School PGT programme integrated digital citizenship into induction activities.
 - Securing a place for digital safety and citizenship training for incoming Wellbeing Advisors and Student Advisors.
 - Digital safety focus group run by Digital Safety Support intern for operational purposes, conducted with ISG student interns summer 2022.
 - REAR (Race Equality and Anti-Racism) action plan.
 - Operational action plan for enhancing digital safety support services at the University.
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We anticipate findings will be further disseminated through a Teaching Matters blog post, adaptable for wider publication in THE Campus, for example. Although producing a journal article would be ideal, our findings will be disseminated elsewhere in the interim given the urgency of this topic.

What have been the benefits to student learning?

This project helps make the case for enhanced embedding of digital citizenship within the University of Edinburgh curricula, which will help support both students and staff in their online engagement, feeding into better support for digital and mental health.

How could these benefits be extended to other parts of the university?

Findings from our research will be developed into a comprehensive operational action plan to enhance digital safety and citizenship related support at the University of Edinburgh, and shared with key support groups in the development of the new, transformed curriculum and new model for student support.

Who can be contacted for further details?

For further details, please contact [Vicki Madden](#) or [Louise Connelly](#).
