



Digital Inclusion



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Digital inclusion is important because **it helps ensure that all members the university community** have meaningful access to key learning experiences.

Digital tools can provide flexible access to teaching, learning, assessment and feedback activities that are networked and dynamic. However, in society the spread of access and use of digital technology is uneven. There is evidence to suggest that many people remain digitally excluded. As reliance on digital technology in education increases, there is a risk that the divide between those with digital skills, and those who struggle to overcome barriers to access and use, will continue to widen ([ONS, 2019](#)).

In our Vision 2025 Document, the University of Strathclyde enhanced its commitment to “widening access and inclusion across the University”. Clearly, issues of digital inclusion are of paramount importance in this context.



Barriers to Digital Inclusion

Broadly speaking, the barriers to digital inclusion can be categorised under the following three headings ([Helsper and Van Deursen, 2017](#)):

- The skills gap to use, or means to learn
- A lack of internet and / or device access
- The motivation and confidence to use, understand or engage

While the process of supporting students to overcome these barriers is complex and multifaceted, there are simple steps that teachers can take to promote digital inclusion at Strathclyde

9 tips for digitally inclusive classrooms

- Consider offering a '**module induction**' to introduce your students to your class on MyPlace, the kinds of activities they will be expected to undertake and establish clear mutual expectations regarding communication, participation, group-work etc.
 - Ensure that your students can access **help and support with technology**. Ensure they are aware of, and can access resources like the [Student MyPlace support pages](#)
 - Consider using **live captions** in Teams or Zoom meetings to support the meaningful engagement of all students
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Create accessible documents and rich media. The Open University's free online course ['Accessibility of eLearning'](#) is a good place to start

- **Anticipate and allow for technical issues**
- Consider a '**hybrid**' approach to teaching so that students experiencing digital access issues can still engage meaningfully with teaching content (for example by completing an asynchronous learning activity) if challenges connecting to live sessions exist
- Provide students with a **blend of synchronous and asynchronous communication opportunities** so that students who are unable to participate in live sessions can still ask questions and engage meaningfully with their peers and teaching staff

- Consider making teaching resources **available for download** so that they can be viewed/interacted with by students with limited access to the internet

- Strive to **create a welcoming environment online**. This can be as simple as:
 - Acknowledging names and identity – encourage students to display their preferred names and pronouns, and suggest they upload their picture to their profile.
 - Encourage students to have their cameras on, recognising that this is not a requirement and the choice is theirs. Explain that when we can all see each other, we feel more connected and engaged.
 - Encourage Small Group Interaction – for example through break-out rooms and off-line groups work
 - Be present – visit breakout rooms and encourage discussion
 - Using learner agreements to establish clear learner expectations

Do you currently consider and plan teaching, learning and assessment with digital inclusion in mind? What challenges have you or your students experienced? Would you add to or modify the list of tips above? Leave a comment in the box below to join the conversation