

# University Policy for Student Digital Equity



Summary			
<p>As digital practices increasingly underpin learning, teaching and research, the University recognises the importance of an inclusive digital environment. Our approach focuses on identifying and mitigating barriers to participation in digital education. We are prioritising action in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Ensuring digital accessibility for disabled students and those with additional needs</li><li>Supporting access to study environments and library collections</li><li>Addressing the most pressing challenges related to device and connectivity access</li></ul>			
Scope - This document applies to:			
This policy applies to students on campus-based courses at all levels of study: Foundation, UG, PGT and PGR. It does not apply to students on online courses.			
Applies to academic year:		2025/26	
Document Control			
Owning team	Bristol Institute for Learning and Teaching		
Division	Education and Student Experience		
Lead contact	Sarah Davies		
Type	Policy	Status	Final draft
Asset number	N/A	Version	V4
Approved by	University Education Committee	Date current version approved	18 September 2025
Date current version published		Date first published	23 September 2020
Revision schedule	Annual	Next review date	March 2026
Superseded documents	V3 24/25		
Related documents	<u>Student Rules and Regulations</u>		
Keywords	Digital education, equity		



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As digital practices increasingly underpin learning, teaching and research, the University recognises the importance of an inclusive digital environment. Our approach focuses on identifying and mitigating barriers to participation in digital education. We are prioritising action in the following areas:

- Ensuring digital accessibility for disabled students and those with additional needs
- Supporting access to study environments and library collections
- Addressing the most pressing challenges related to device and connectivity access

## Access to suitable devices and connectivity

### Undergraduate and postgraduate taught students

All students will need a [suitable device](#) and reliable connectivity in order to access their study materials at a place and time which suits them. Students are expected to provide their own device, and ensure that they have suitable connectivity if they wish to study off-campus. The University web page on [Your Computer](#) includes a list of discounts available on laptops, including refurbished devices.

The University has a limited [Digital Support Fund](#) which can help students in financial difficulties with the cost of unexpected repairs to their devices mid-year. The DSF is available to students who either receive a means-tested bursary or have been assessed as being in financial difficulty through the Financial Assistance Fund.

Students who are temporarily without a suitable laptop may be able to obtain a loan laptop from IT Services for a period of up to one month, to give them time to get their laptop fixed or purchase a new one.

### Postgraduate research students

Postgraduate research students on campus are provided with a laptop (or desktop if there is specific need) plus access to other hardware, peripherals and software. PGR students may also be eligible for support from the [Digital Support Fund](#). PGR students are not eligible for home equipment provision.

## Anticipating connectivity challenges

41% of students surveyed in November-December 2023 reported experiencing wifi connectivity issues on campus which affected their learning, and 39% experienced such issues off campus. Additionally, 30% of students said that mobile data costs made it difficult to use digital technologies in their learning. For this reason, unit teams should provide some flexibility in how or when students access online materials and sessions, to enable students to work around any connectivity issues.

## Use of artificial intelligence

The use of artificial intelligence is becoming increasingly important in many aspects of personal organisation, task management, work and study. The University provides an

enhanced version of Co-pilot, available to all staff and students when they are logged into Microsoft 365 on the Edge browser. This is the default AI tool that should be recommended to students where study or assessment tasks permit or require AI, to ensure that all students have equality of access to the technology.

To support students to develop skills and understand appropriate uses of AI within education, Study Skills have produced a guide to [Using AI at University](#). Academic teams will make decisions on the appropriate level of AI use for different types of task and assessment, and must clearly communicate these to students using the [AI categories](#).

The university also provides access to a range of other [software and digital tools for students](#).

### [Access to library collections, skills and study spaces](#)

Key course texts and additional resources to support wider study, projects and research interests are made available online to ensure ease and equity of access to the extent possible within budgets and licence restrictions.

The Subject Support team formed of Subject Librarians and Teaching & Learning Librarians provides training and support to assist in the use of these resources. The Library Support service provides alternative formats to ensure accessibility of course material to disabled students and those with additional needs. The Study Skills team provides online learning resources which are open access, and individual tutorials and group workshops will be provided online, to allow greater access for those who cannot attend in person.

A proportion of study spaces will be bookable, with others available on a drop-in basis, and the balance between these will be flexed according to the time of year and associated study space needs. An Accessible Technology Room is located in the Arts & Social Sciences Library offering specialist assistive technology.

A laptop loan service is available in the following locations: Arts & Social Sciences, Wills Memorial and Medical libraries. Laptops borrowed are for use in those libraries only and must be returned before the library closes (or within 24 hours, for 24/7 study centres).

### [Accessibility of online and blended learning to disabled students](#)

Use of online and blended teaching, and digital resources, presents a range of potential challenges as well as benefits to our disabled students; the [definition of disability](#) is wider than is commonly understood and may include conditions many might not consider a disability. The University aims to make its teaching accessible to all students in two main ways: by providing accessible websites and resources in anticipation of need, and by making reasonable adjustments where specific needs are identified.

### [Anticipatory provision of accessible teaching and online resources](#)

Recent UK and EU Digital Accessibility legislation require Universities to ensure all digital content available to students, staff and the public is accessible. This includes the provision of captions on recorded audio and video material. Key tools and services should include accessibility statements, outlining the level of web accessibility that tool aims to achieve. Guidance on producing accessible teaching and resources is available from the Digital Education Office, and the templates in Blackboard Original and Blackboard Ultra will help all staff produce accessible courses. Accessibility and usability have been a particular focus of our roll-out of Blackboard Ultra. Automatically generated captions are added by default on audio and video materials in Replay. The Blackboard Ally tool helps to check accessibility of resources, provides tips for authors to improve accessibility, and provides materials in alternative formats.

### Tailored support for disabled students

Disabled students may be entitled to support with purchasing any assistive hardware or software which is required for a disability-related need. They can request reasonable adjustments to teaching and assessment to ensure that disabled students can fully participate in education and other benefits, facilities and services provided for all students. Disabled students who require personal recordings or captions of lectures should request specialist support through Disability Services. The Library is able to source or create published works in alternative formats, as permitted by copyright.

Further information on how to get study support for a disability is available at [Disability Support](#).

### Student digital capabilities

In order to thrive in a blended learning environment, students need capabilities in digital learning, communication, participation, creation, problem solving and innovation, and strong information and data literacies. They will also increasingly need to make judgements about when and how to use artificial intelligence.

To support all students in developing the skills and confidence they need to engage effectively with the online aspects of their teaching and study from the start of term, we are offering Digitally Ready, a digital induction, before formal teaching starts. This includes familiarisation with the types of activity and tools they are likely to come across in their teaching, as well as with the collaborative participation and/or interaction with peer learning which will help them thrive in blended environments. This will be available as a resource for all students to refer to throughout the teaching year.

The development of digital skills in using discipline-specific software will be embedded into the relevant academic units.

[Study skills support](#) will be provided to students in a range of flexible online and blended formats, mirroring in-person provision.

### Equitable and respectful online behaviours

Interactions online often feel different to participants from face to face /in person interactions, and without visual and body language cues, there is more potential for misunderstanding.

Staff and students have a responsibility to work together to ensure that online sessions and discussions, whether live or asynchronous, are inclusive and that all students are encouraged to contribute equitably and their contributions are respected. Staff development for teaching staff includes consideration of inclusion in teaching, and awareness and challenging of any unconscious biases. Training on the design of courses on Blackboard includes consideration of accessibility and inclusive design. Digitally ready supports students in developing constructive, respectful and inclusive online behaviours.

### Assessment

It is particularly important to ensure that students have equity in the preparation, creation and submission of assessed work. All of the areas above may impact on digital equity in assessment, including lack of a suitable laptop, connectivity or software, accessibility issues or need for reasonable adjustments and alternative exam arrangements, and lack of familiarity with the digital environment and tools used in the assessment.

Schools should seek to mitigate the risk of inequity as far as possible, liaising with IT Services, Digital Education Office, and Disability Services as appropriate. Guidance is available on good practice in the design and management of digital exams. It is important to

ensure that students have opportunities to practice and check that assessment formats work for them prior to a summative assessment. Students who are concerned that they may be disadvantaged by any assessment should contact their school in the first instance to make them aware of their circumstances.

### Digital wellbeing

Increased use of technologies and digital services can have an impact – both positive and negative – on people’s mental, physical, social and emotional health. The University’s Curriculum Framework emphasises the importance of active, collaborative learning, in order to build belonging and mitigate the risk of students feeling isolated. A consideration of digital wellbeing is embedded in Digitally Ready, to support students to develop awareness of, and manage, the positive and negative impacts of technology on their own wellbeing. Programmes/schools who make use of digital forums and collaboration tools are encouraged to agree ground rules with students for positive and inclusive digital participation at the start of formal teaching.

The University will continue to carry out consultation and co-design activities with students to understand the student digital experience, identify issues which are impacting on students, and co-design solutions.