

Personalisation in electronic environments

Personalisation has emerged as a key concept in the Government's vision for public service sector reform, and is seen as a crucial underpinning to learning.

Personalisation is essentially about those with a responsibility to provide learning and teaching working in partnership with learners. Recognising and valuing what learners bring to learning and teaching experiences and communities - their experiences, interests, needs and preferences - is essential to understanding, supporting and developing aspirations and potential. Current examples of how the sector is approaching this partnership include establishing councils and formalised representative structures, and building on existing formative and summative student feedback.

Personalised learning underpins the programme of change outlined in the recent FE White Paper. This includes emphasis on effective assessment of initial learner needs, improving pastoral support, along with developing learner 'voice and choice' through participation and representation. The intention is to improve learner engagement, achievement and progression and influence the shape of future provision. Colleges would argue that they already have well developed systems in place and a well developed ethos that puts learners and their individual needs at the heart of what they do.

AoC NILTA is committed to leading on the essential role of ICT and e-learning within the personalisation agenda, particularly on interoperability, e-assessment, e-portfolio, student communications, student tracking systems and the unique learner number (ULN). We believe that the following underpin effective practice:

- The appropriate strategic and practical deployment of technologies
- An appreciation of how learners are currently engaging with technologies
- A vision of the educational potential of those technologies.

Point 27 of the FE White Paper Executive summary calls for "Increasing personalisation so that individual needs and circumstances are built into the design and delivery of education and training". We want to see the commitment to ensuring that the design and delivery of education and training is flexible enough to respond positively to and incorporate individual needs and circumstances.

Currently, there are numerous products on the market claiming to 'provide' personalisation. The reality of personalisation to our diverse learner communities, as anyone working in education can testify, is a highly complex one.

Participation and the impact of online social network practices

This document provides a starting point for the ongoing work of AoC NILTA in this area, providing a working overview of meaningful personalisation within electronic environments, breaking down what personalisation could be, and could look like, in to a set of definitions and a set of functions.

This paper is written in response to the increasing need to develop a shared vocabulary and understanding around personalisation - and in recognition of the high stakes in terms of the quality of provision developed as a result of that understanding.

This paper looks at two ways of supporting personalisation and moving the personalisation agenda forward. Firstly, three broad definitions of what

personalisation is. These, we propose are all equally important to facilitating meaningful provision. Secondly, a checklist for effective personalisation. Again, our approach is not to suggest that any particular element, tool or activity is essential, but rather that the sum of provision is what is most important.

It is important to remember that many organisations currently do support effective personalisation, and that there are many excellent examples of practice across the sector. This paper is written within the context of personalisation within education as a whole, and is designed to examine the particular opportunities presented by ICT and e-learning. Our definition is also informed by the new opportunities presented by recent developments in technology, particularly the maturity of some open source applications and the availability of low-cost, easy to use social networking applications and tools. While this paper discusses personalisation within and supported by electronic environments and tools, we recognise that within people's learning, work and lives, electronic and physical spaces are increasingly regarded as complimentary, supportive and interdependent. Accordingly, we do not view the benefits or use of ICT and e-Learning in education as separable from education in the round.

What is personalisation? Three definitions

We offer three models of personalisation, and provide a definition of each:

Adaptive personalisation refers to the seamless provision and direction of learners. Within an educational context, this is similar to a VLE tracking student progress through a series of tasks, and providing automated feedback. Passive personalisation refers to the pre-organised provision of a personalised experience – learners may be able to access the same process from a different location, complete tasks at their own pace, or are presented with a range of tools and access determined by their username. While this offers a tailored experience to each learner, differentiation is based upon the curriculum or the category of learner or the learner as a member of an organisation, rather than as an individual. We can broadly categorise this as **institutional provision and procedure**.

A student swipes in to college in the morning and then to each of her classes, creating entries on an electronic registration system which can identify where she is, create a record of her attendance, and perhaps authorise her EMA payment.

She logs on to a computer using her college username and password. Associated with the account there is an email account, file space, and her library records. She also logs on to the College VLE – which provides her with records of her progress, reminders of deadlines, and whole-course directed messages from her tutor.

She may also have been collecting information for her UCAS application. Using another Username and password, she logs onto the system and retrieves the application to date.

Customisation refers to the learner's ability to select from a range of pre-determined elements in order to modify their space, make choices and engage in those activities which reflect and support their needs and preferences. Customisation **enables the learner to engage with institutional provision**.

A learner uses an internet browser to increase the font size of the application he is working on.

In the process of setting up a blog for a project he is working on, the learner selects a template and chooses a layout. He does not want anyone outside of his work group to be able to view his information or work, so he restricts profile and post access to his team.

Dynamic personalisation refers to what we regard as learner-led personalisation: support and acknowledgement for the learner to create, write, collaborate and direct content and activity within the contexts of their own choosing. This is **the institution engaging with the learner**.

All of the institutions' AS and A-Level art and photography students are encouraged to open Flickr accounts and to join the institutions group. The students showcase some of their work on the site and are encouraged to critically engage with others from the community. Many of them additionally upload pictures that are only available to people they have authorised as friends or family, so that their friends might see their college work as well as personal pictures. They may also start their own groups, or contribute to groups belonging to people within or outside of their formal learning community.

Some of the learners are working on a group project. They each attribute a project specific tag to the images they upload so that they can quickly search for the images, as well as discuss their work through comments.

The quality of educational provision is increasingly represented *and* delivered by learning providers' web presence and activities. Students increasingly expect the same level of service they receive offline as on. However, outside of the Colleges VLE and electronic registration, the students' direct experience of e-personalisation is not necessarily common.

What is personalisation? A checklist for Colleges

1: Usability

Usability must be the litmus test of personalisation within education, both on and offline. The criterion for usability covers economic and cultural differences, e-confidence, preference, platform and hardware diversity and disability. This can be characterised in the following ways:

- There is provision for all users to access the activity or resource, regardless of economic circumstance.
- There is provision for appropriate support in using systems and tools are provided so that access is not dependent on familiarity with or confidence in using online activities or resources.
- The activity or resource can be accessed at times and sites that suit all learners.
- Navigating the activity or resource is intuitive and straightforward.
- Learning materials are flexible, adaptive and accessible.

- The resource or activity has been designed with reference to interoperability standards.

2: Identity

Flexible and adaptive software applications and systems which support common identity management across applications and content, easy-to-use user-managed disclosure of personal profiles and presence. This would be characterised in the following ways:

- The resource or activities differentiate between users.
- Provides areas for individual, peer to peer, or group work.
- Track user's progress through tasks or resources.
- Provides evaluation and feedback.
- Provides quantitative assessment and grading.
- Provision for user to upload resources in a variety of formats.
- Provision of user-specific and customisable tools: calendar, time-zone, messaging, email integration.
- Grading, evaluation, and feedback is customisable.
- Data sets including results are customisable and exportable.

3: Participation

The recognition of the value of community participation and collaboration is supported by the facility for users to develop and promote their own voice and opinions, and shape their own education and learning. It supports both e-literacy and citizenship, and the two are viewed here as mutually dependant and co-operative agendas, which enrich and advance learning and achievement:

- Users are provided with space to accommodate learners' different circumstances, knowledge, skills, experiences and personal preferences.
- Users can customise their profiles, space and any online presence.
- Users are provided with the skills to develop and articulate an online presence and voice.
- Users are able to create and influence the learning environment.
- Users can shape frameworks and select tools.
- Users can interact with one another in both formal and informal ways.
- Users are active in the clarification of the rights, responsibilities and potential consequences of online participation.

4: Portability

Portability refers to the facilitation of personalisation beyond the provider environments. For example, enabling students to access resources and information via extra or internet; the engagement of institutions with a range of devices – for example students accessing or receiving information via their mobile phones. It also refers to the ability of students to import and export information, for example by submitting their online photographs to their e-portfolio or exporting their exam results to their CV or sending that data to a potential university.

- Users can collaborate, take part in and create a range of communities both inside and outside of the institutions membership.
- Users can create public personal profiles.

- The ability for users to re-purpose and re-mix their own and others work in accordance with licensing permissions both inside and outside of the contexts of their institution.
- Users are encouraged to investigate plagiarism, data protection and licensing issues.
- Users can incorporate activity carried out on self selected websites or applications into their recognised work.
- Users can export content they have created across applications and organisations.