Digital Skills at the University of Limerick

A case study in designing for embeddability

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We expect digital competence from students.

We rarely design opportunities for it to be developed.

THE QUESTION I GRAPPLED WITH

Where do our students systematically develop the digital competence we expect them to demonstrate?

A QUESTION FOR YOU

Where, in your institution, do students systematically develop the digital competence they are expected to demonstrate?

We asked the students

In 2019, UL ran the Irish National Digital Experience (INDEx) survey.

1,378 students responded.

We asked

> *"What one thing should the institution do - or do better - to improve your experience of digital teaching and learning?"*

TOP 3 UL STUDENT RESPONSES

1. More digital learning workshops and resources
2. More effective VLE use by staff
3. **Embed digital skills into existing programmes**

Source: INDEx Survey, UL institutional data, November 2019 (n = 1,378)

WHAT STUDENTS ASKED FOR

More institutional emphasis on digital skills, literacies, etc. as part of all existing programmes.

Integration into what they were already doing.

The response. Design for embeddability

Originally, offered co-curricular workshop programme. From September 2023, we shifted approach.

Embeddable infrastructure. Open to UL community while also intentionally embeddable in module contexts.
Piloted in first-year BA Arts module.
Now, embedded in 14 modules, UG and PG. Forms 10-20% of assessed coursework.

***LevUL Up* Digital Skills Hub (DSH)**

Self-assessment tools

Self-study resources (Creative Commons licensed OER)

Automated assessments

Framework-informed design

The design constraint

Every decision governed by

"Can this be embedded into a module without creating burden?"

What is the Digital Skills Hub (DSH)?

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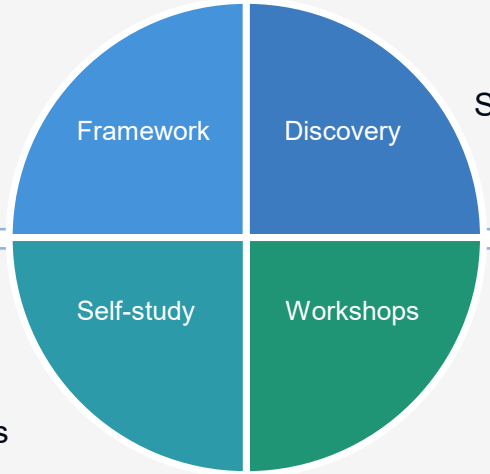
Framework

Common framing/understanding

Discovery

Self-assessment via Discovery Tool



Self-Study Resources

‘Digital Essentials’ set of resources

GenAI, prompting, communication, wellbeing, video creation, Excel, accessibility, etc.

Workshops

Live and recorded sessions

Data Gathering

Currently gathering data about perceptions and experiences with DSH activities with a view to evaluating its effectiveness and impact.
Three complementary data sources.

Self-Study Resource Feedback

Survey at end of resources.
Ongoing.

Module-level Survey

Issued to students within modules embedding DSH, Autumn 2025.
Ongoing.

Module Lead Interviews

1-to-1 online interviews.
Standard set of questions.
Ongoing.

Preliminary data will be presented for Autumn 2025.

FINDING 1 (PRELIMINARY)

Embedding creates engagement

When digital skills development is embedded into curricula, potentially tied to assessed coursework, engagement becomes less a question of student motivation.

Optional resources work for the already motivated individual. Curricular integration reaches whole cohorts.

Overall rating of DSH activities/resources

SELF-STUDY RESOURCES

98% rate 3+ stars Average: 4.3/5

n = 370

MODULE-LEVEL EMBED EXPERIENCE

93% rate 3+ stars Average: 3.6/5

n = 183

Preliminary data, Autumn 2025

WE ASKED STUDENTS

"Including these activities inside the module (rather than outside it) makes sense to me."

78%

agree or strongly agree

40 strongly agree • **101** agree • 28 not sure • 5 disagree • **7** strongly disagree

Source: Module-level survey, Autumn 2025 (n=181 valid responses, 2 marked N/A excluded)

FINDING 2 (PRELIMINARY)

Embedded skills can transfer

Students report applying skills developed through these activities to both their assignments and to contexts beyond the originating module.

Other modules. Placement. Part-time work.

Skills that transfer are assets.

Survey items

“I can apply what I learned to this module’s assessments."

81%

agree or strongly agree

"The skills from these activities are transferable to other modules, placement or work."

86%

agree or strongly agree

Source: Module-level survey, Autumn 2025. n = 183.

FINDING 3 (PRELIMINARY)

Embedding need not mean burden for academics

Module leads report that embedding these components did not increase workload.
Intentional design made this possible.

Automated assessment

No substantive marking required.

Modular architecture

Module leads select components.
Flexibility within structure.

Consultative support

Partnership with module leads.
Clear boundaries.

Preliminary feedback from module lead interviews, Autumn 2025, suggests the embed process felt manageable.

Designed for integration. Not retrofitted for it.

Embeddability isn't a feature.
It's the condition that makes successful adoption possible.

DIGITAL SKILLS HUB MODEL

Designed for academic embedding (*embeddability*)

Modular activities/resources

Adoption requires selection and some negotiation

Adaptable resources – CC licensed OER

Automated assessments

Architecture enables scale (*sustainability*)

A QUESTION

If designing for embeddability changes outcomes for digital skills, what else might benefit from the same approach?

Academic integrity. Information literacy. AI readiness.
Sustainability. Wellbeing.

Where are our students expected to demonstrate competencies that they've had no systematic opportunity to develop?

Our self-study resources are openly available.

Does the underlying principle of embeddability apply to any challenges you're facing?

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LevUL Up Digital Skills Hub

Scan for resources

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