

## DIGITAL NATIVES – DO THEY REALLY NEED SUPPORTED?

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### Abstract

Today's students are often referred to as "the net generation". Their passion for technology and its use in teaching and learning is unquenchable. This provokes, perhaps, an unusual question; "Do these students need supported in use of tools they own and regularly avail of?" The paper considers support as a many faceted concept; for example, institutional policies on information and communications technologies (ICT) in teaching and learning, assistance with use of technology, development and delivery of courses in an appealing style, faculty engagement with ICT, as well as the quality of provision of ICT on campus and how it is used in communications and information strategies. "Support" is considered in the broader context of how technological acceptance influences how a university develops its strategies.

ICT systems are regulated with policies, standards and "best practices" frequently with a focus on providing a secure ICT facility for business-critical applications. Course development and delivery, and student ICT systems are similarly regulated. Much emphasis is placed on permissible practice, with lesser importance attached to accessibility of ICT. Support service provision must be attentive to many aspects of the teaching and learning process, for example whether the student is a distance learner whose medium is a virtual learning environment, are they campus-based but using support technologies for group-based work, or does support need to be flexible and facilitate "24x7" practices. Our administrative systems and associated processes have increasing relevance to students and academic staff and therefore are no longer the exclusive tools of administrators. The development of a strategy must be informed by the needs and information processing practices of these new user groups, especially students. Their routine use of personal devices as communications tools, coupled with changes in how students relate to tertiary education programmes, need to be considered. The question remains do digital natives fit comfortably into our processes, or must we be more attentive to what students expect of a contemporary university education? These are typical of the issues addressed by the paper, with emphasis being upon the projection of strategic approach towards a corporate supportive environment where a wide range of administrative and academic activity is presented through ICT architecture and institutional approach to strategic planning that supports students through use of ubiquitous devices. The need to encompass a wide range of considerations, including organisational development, exploitation of new web-based technologies and the changing approach to learning and teaching being adopted by students, within the overall institutional strategy is explored; as is the need for strategy to be informed by student ownership and use of ubiquitous digital devices.

Research activity in service science is briefly examined. Can a new discipline create increased maturity in approaches to service delivery and development for "digital natives"? The paper draws on work published by Eunis<sup>1</sup>, Educause<sup>2</sup> and JISC<sup>3</sup> to inform discussion.

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<sup>1</sup> See URL [www.eunis.org](http://www.eunis.org)

<sup>2</sup> See URL [www.educause.edu](http://www.educause.edu)

<sup>3</sup> See URL [www.jisc.ac.uk](http://www.jisc.ac.uk)