Curriculum
Redefined

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

How Might We:

Digital literacy

Contents

Overview

Digital literacies are those capabilities which fit an individual for living, learning and working in a digital society. Digital literacy looks beyond functional IT skills to describe a richer set of digital behaviours, practices and identities. What it means to be digitally literate changes over time and across contexts, so digital literacies are essentially a set of academic and professional situated practices supported by diverse and changing technologies. (JISC, 2014)

The changes and adaptation we have experienced working in the digital sphere over the last two years have necessitated an increased need to equip our students with the digital literacy required for their academic studies and future lives. Our students, upon graduation, need to be confident in their ability to utilise different digital tools and platforms to solve problems, to communicate critically, and to think and design creatively (Educause, 2019).

We can build on the excellent practice that we have already developed during the pandemic to ensure that digital literacy is at the core of our students' learning experience. Students will need to be supported to develop the digital literacy required to be active, critically engaged contributors to this developing academic environment. Digital literacy development needs to be embedded as a core aspect of the curriculum alongside academic and professional literacies, and doing so will ensure that digital literacy is acquired alongside subject specific knowledge and skills.

We need to understand digital literacy not as a loose set of skills that students can acquire solely as an extra-curricular activity, but as something which is integral to their learning and is discipline specific. We must provide real-world, authentic tasks that offer students the opportunity to develop their digital literacy.

University of Leeds Digital Literacy Framework

The Digital Literacy Framework provides guidance for staff to inform the development and provision of appropriate resources and support. The content was produced by an interdisciplinary team including academic staff, professional services and students, with reference to national and international guidance on digital capabilities. It is essential for all staff and students at Leeds to have opportunities to benefit from the framework, but the ways that digital capabilities will be achieved or assessed will need to vary with reference to disciplinary contexts and requirements for professional accreditation.

Student voice

Even in 2014, eight years ago and well before the pandemic, a survey of employers revealed that over 90% of new graduate jobs require digital capabilities (Jisc, 2014). A digitally fluent graduate needs to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the digital environment, and be confident to collaboratively create content and adapt to new digital contexts.

There is often a disconnect between students' expectations of the digital content of their programmes and academics' expectations of their students' abilities. Recognising the myth of the 'digital native', we should ensure that we make no assumptions of students' digital capability and that we scaffold their development throughout their programme. By embedding digital literacies in the curriculum alongside academic and professional literacies, we can ensure that all students, regardless of prior knowledge or experience, will be exposed to the possibilities using digital technologies can afford.

As students progress through their programme, they will need to demonstrate the ability to find, understand, articulate and apply ways of thinking, knowing and communicating in a digital context. Through authentic and realistic assessments that challenge them to develop their skills, they will develop confidence to apply, adapt and develop different tools and technologies as required by their assessments or work.

How might we...

Practitioner-based tips

- Identify areas to embed digital literacy when designing new module or programme learning outcomes that offer students the opportunity to adapt their current digital skills or acquire new skills

- Use formative and summative assessment to encourage student innovation in the use of digital technology

- Create opportunities for collaboration and co-creation of digital items as part of an assessment task

- Design group interaction and project management, whereby students are encouraged to solve problems and produce digital items

- Ensure students understand the relevance of the digital elements of the module or programme to their future lives or career plans

- Identify opportunities for students to reflect on their own digital capabilities and what aspects they might need to develop

- Encourage students to explore and share digital tools that make their studies easier, for instance reference management or note making tools
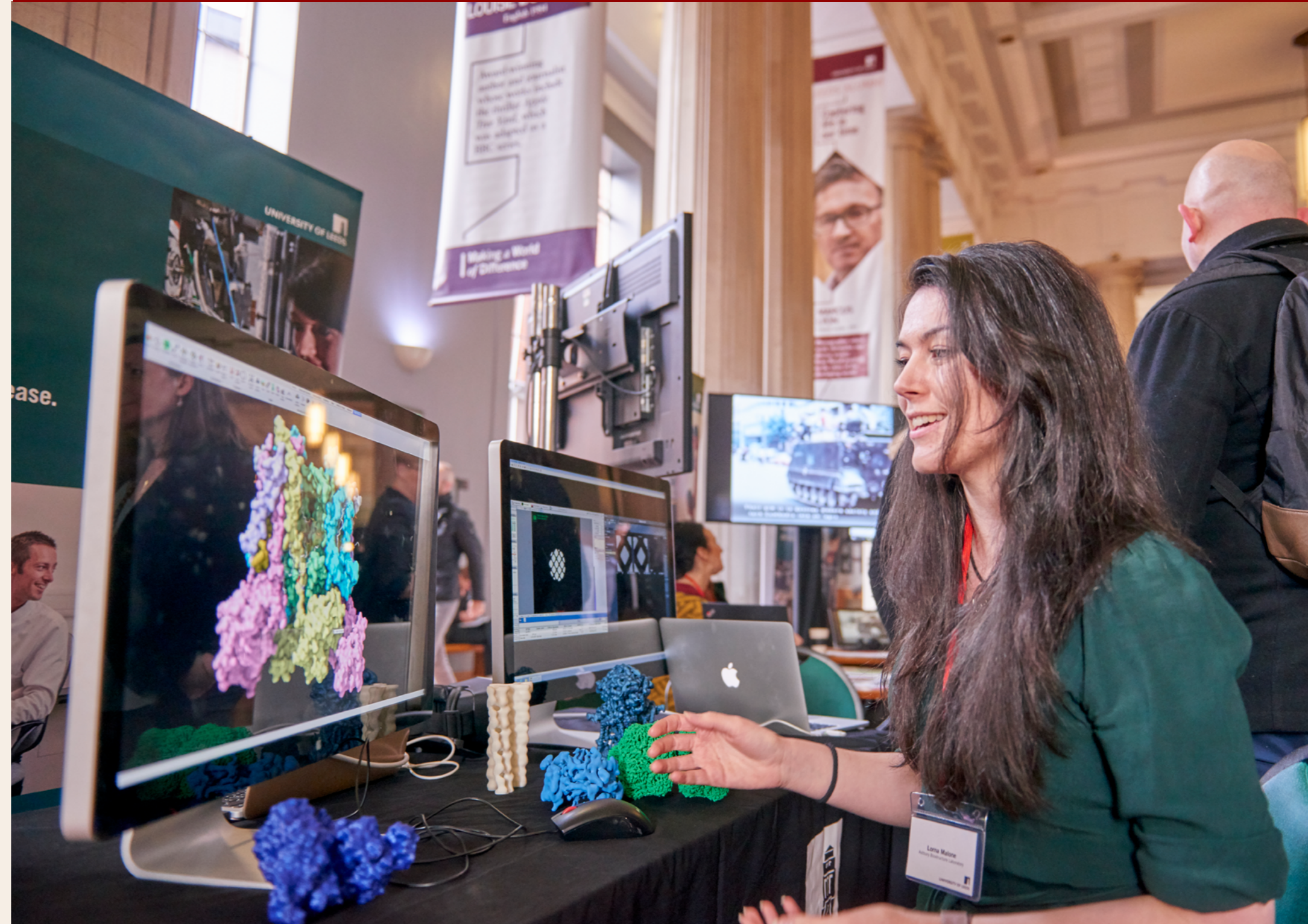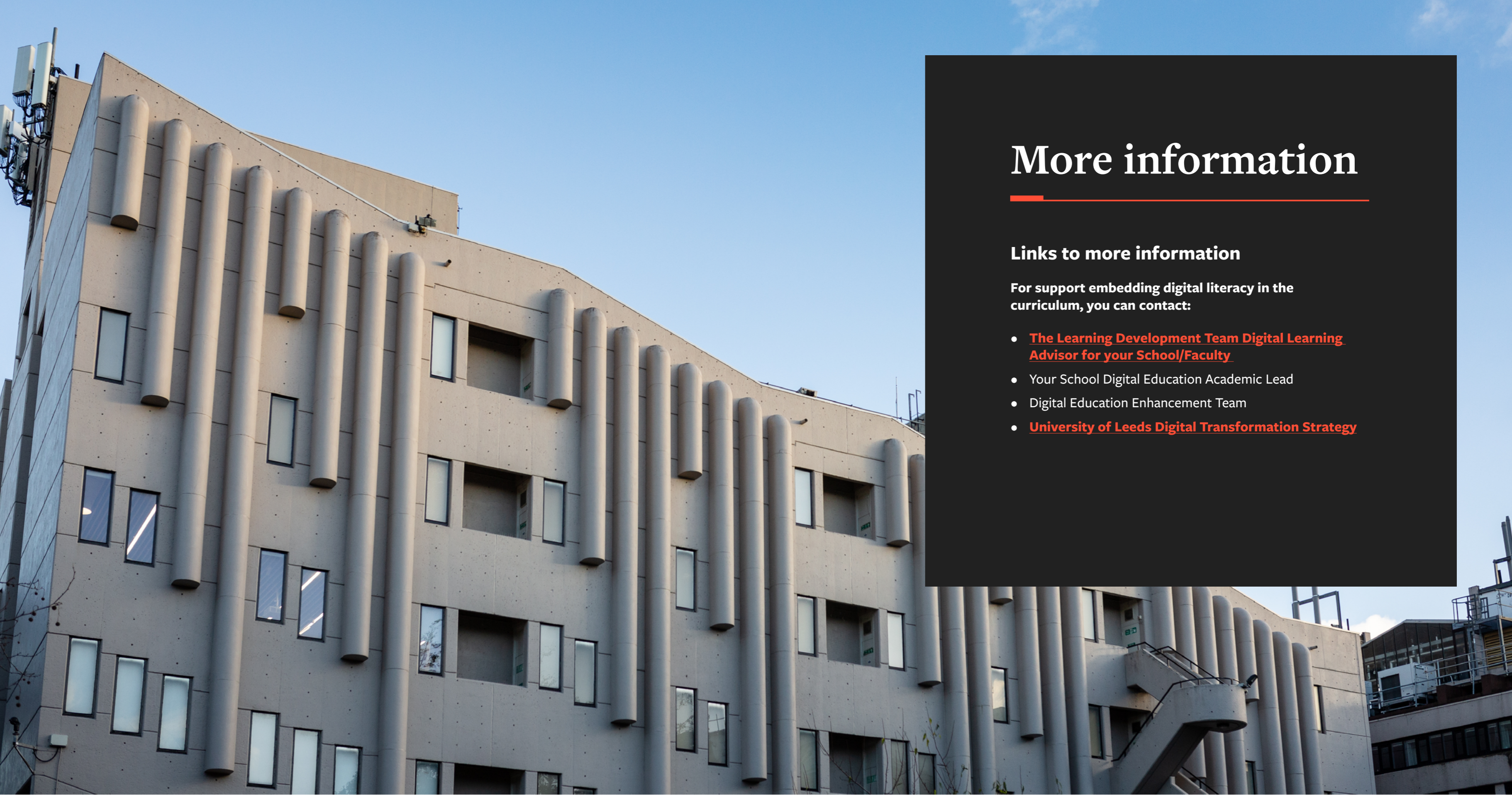
More information

Links to more information

For support embedding digital literacy in the curriculum, you can contact:

- **The Learning Development Team Digital Learning Advisor for your School/Faculty**
- Your School Digital Education Academic Lead
- Digital Education Enhancement Team
- **University of Leeds Digital Transformation Strategy**

References

Horizon Report Preview, Higher Education Edition, Educause, February 2019

JISC Digital Capabilities

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H. Beetham, L. McGill, & A. Littlejohn, (2009). Thriving in the 21st century: Learning Literacies for the Digital Age (LLiDA project). London: JISC