

Supporting user-generated, media-enhanced approaches to learning

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About this briefing

Focusing on user-generated media-enhanced learning, this briefing provides:

- An **explanation** of why it is important
- A set of **approaches** for supporting it
- A summary of factors affecting **institutional capacity** to support it

To make use of this briefing

Academic staff:

Focus on an approach of interest.

1. How well does your institution support the approach?
2. What else may need to be in place?

Educational or technical specialists:

Focus on your area of expertise.

1. How well do you or your services currently support these approaches?
2. What could be improved?

Institutional managers:

Consider the requirements for institutional provision.

1. What are the weak points in supporting this innovation?
2. How can any gaps in provision be addressed?

What is media-enhanced learning?

The use of digital media (particularly digital audio and video) can be valuable in learning, teaching and assessment in two main ways:

- Media resources are **presented** to students in order to orientate, motivate, support or challenge them.
- Media resources are **made** by students to support learner enquiry, reflection or communication.

In an appropriately supportive learning environment, digital media can therefore extend the ways in which learners engage with a topic, as users and producers of knowledge.

What is user-generated media?

The term 'user-generated media' refers to digital audio and video produced by **anyone** who wants to develop and share ideas using creative media in a timely way. Many people are doing this independently because digital media technology is increasingly **ubiquitous, affordable** and **easy to use**. The simple production methods involved can be empowering, heightening the **currency** and **relevance** of academic content, fostering greater **ownership** of teaching and learning processes, and embedding **digital fluency** and **self-efficacy** in the curriculum in a meaningful way.

Why consider institutional capacity?

Whilst ideas are emerging for enriching the curriculum with user-generated media, and students and staff have access to devices for recording audio and video, relevant institutional support is fragmented and often unaligned. Institutions need to ensure that their **organisational conditions, support processes, and technical infrastructure** are fit for purpose, enabling all staff and students to easily share the media they produce.

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Approaches for enhancing learning through the use of user-generated media

1. Audio, screencast and video feedback

What is it: Formative guidance given in digital format, usually as audio, recorded by tutors for individual students or student groups in response to both ongoing and submitted work. Sometimes produced by peers. Models dialogic pedagogy. Feedback can be given on visual submissions when produced as screencasts (e.g. essays, photographs, diagrams, websites, blogs, etc).

Typical attributes: personal, quickly distributed and timely, usually lasting less than 10 minutes, easy to adapt to meet specific contexts; screencasts capture the work and include feedback commentary as audio and screen-based annotations.

Likely challenges: Targeted and secure delivery to students; administration and management of files; availability of screencast software and the selection of optimum output settings for clear audio and video but downloadable files.

2. Digital posters

What is it: Student presentations that combine a digital graphic and student narrative on a given topic submitted as a digital video. The poster can be visually navigated by the author using pan and zoom tools.

Typical attributes: similar to traditional student posters but designed to accommodate opportunities provided by digital media i.e. accessible, asynchronous, easy to distribute, copy and revisit. Detail can be displayed as well as the 'big picture' using zoom controls.

Likely challenges: Availability of suitable screencasting software; student file management skill development; methods for student submission.

3. Prevision casts

What is it: Videos, screencasts or audio files made by tutors to engage students in concepts to be addressed in the weekly seminar or lecture ahead of time. Alternatively, similar techniques can be used to *review* weekly topics (Revision casts) that collectively form a revision pool.

Typical attributes: Made as a set of consistent materials; released and accessible in advance of key learning events such as a weekly lecture and available for later revision. Podcast feeds provide a useful alternative way for students to access these.

Likely challenges: Realistic and consistent tutor design; releasing files according to a schedule; storing resources so they are available in subsequent years; copyright; suitable for use online and in classrooms.

4. Group media project

What is it: The design and production of audio or video pieces as the basis for collaborative and creative student enquiry and project work.

Typical attributes: enjoyable, meaningful and well-framed group tasks in which students learn together by making research, editorial and production decisions.

Likely challenges: ensuring that the technology complements the learning activity rather than dominating it; availability of equipment; a range of support material and exemplars for staff and students to support both planning and skill development; timely feedback on initial plans; submission methods and guidelines; content management to support tutor group assessment and external examination; contingency planning for lost media.

5. Digital storytelling

What is it: Students produce short, compelling stories using digital photos, video, audio and text. It can be used as a way of sharing ideas, experience or supporting personal reflection. Digital 'evidence' can be gathered whilst on placement, on a field trip or whilst conducting a project.

Typical attributes: Crafted, evocative video stories usually made by individuals through the selection of digital artefacts that are gathered, sifted, selected and edited to support learner reflection and to share with tutors and peers the essence of their experience.

Likely challenges: Supporting upfront planning and basic skill development in using digital media; availability and security of devices for students who may be away from the university; contingency planning for lost media; exemplar models; just-in-time guidance material and support; submission methods and guidelines; content management to support tutor group assessment and external examination.

6. Student audio notes

What is it: Students can use personal MP3 recorders or mobile phone voice recording tools to capture ideas, presentations, peer or tutor conversations and decisions for later review.

Typical attributes: autonomous student productions; both short and long recordings; variety of formats; uploaded on campus, from home, or on the move.

Likely challenges: designing appropriate policies and guidance; effective management of storage and quotas.

7. Expert voices

What is it: Recordings of 'experts' from the professional world as contributions to the module's VLE-hosted podcast, including modelling of professional practice, interviews about real world stories, responses to questions submitted by students about professional roles, setting professional briefs for authentic student project work.

Typical attributes: Audio interviews involving two or more people; sometimes recordings are planned, but often they are opportunistic; recordings form a valuable collection of reusable resources.

Likely challenges: Availability of recording devices for staff and confidence in using them under pressure (e.g. at conferences); availability of Skype (or other VoIP software) and headsets and knowledge of how to record such calls.

8. Digital case-based learning and augmented reality

What is it: Collections of digital evidence' (audio, video, digital photography and text) that together form a situation that needs to be analysed and interpreted. Audio or video 'actors' (friends, other students) can be used to flesh out the situation and heighten reality through the production of 'news items', fly-on-the-wall footage, etc. Students are asked to take positions, argue their case, and make decisions based on the evidence!

Typical attributes: Engaging, immersive activity informed by a multitude of unstructured resources. Timed release of evidence can be useful.

Likely challenges: A range of devices and suitable support in using them; flash media and cables for devices; space to store the materials; quotas in the VLE that can accommodate materials; repositories for storage of assets from year to year, and support for sharing materials.

Institutional elements that support staff and students in creating and sharing media

Leading institutional change	
Institutional leadership	<p>Recognising and supporting pedagogically-led changes in institutional provision, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ High level support from senior management ▶ Strategic alignment (e.g. Institutional Plan; LTA strategy). ▶ Joined-up coordination of services
Educational development	<p>Raising awareness of opportunities and challenges relating to innovation, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Specific staff-facing advocacy projects that highlight various aspects of Digital Fluency such as IT confidence and alternative assessment media ▶ Projects which promote media-related skills and reward motivated individuals ▶ Supporting early innovators and sharing outcomes as best practice case studies.
Support methods	
Skill development	<p>Training and supporting staff and students in becoming confident practitioners, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Self-help support materials and articles Training via skills workshops, 1:1 support, development days and specialist courses for staff and students, peer mentoring and information at induction ▶ Just-in-time advice from staffed helpdesks, student 'helpers' and enthusiasts and an institution wide network of academic and technical 'experts'.
Technical provision	
IT networks	<p>Facilitating transparent communication within and beyond campuses, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Fast, high-quality, authenticated, and resilient (fully meshed and backed-up). ▶ Local TV network, including podcast, vodcast and extra-curricula channels.
File storage	<p>Supporting the safe storage and retrieval of media projects, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ High capacity files storage, fail-safe, and future-proofed against demand ▶ Storage and distribution options including streaming media servers, media repositories, and remote access provision.
Production equipment	<p>Easy to use equipment for producing audio and video projects, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Access to software and hardware, including mobile devices and online help: equipment is available centrally or locally in Faculties for loan or hire ▶ All PCs support media editing; new PCs have relevant software and sockets.
Systems for sharing media	<p>Facilitating staff and students in directly sharing media with a range of audiences, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Digital media repository systems (proprietary or in-house) ▶ Simple IT systems available to students and staff e.g. for recording and publishing student presentations and discussions ▶ Users can access streamed resources and download copies onto their devices.