TQFE – Introductory Writing Task

Aim
For the student to produce a short piece of academic text, in essay style, for subsequent review as part of the academic induction process.

Essay title
'Discuss the expectations of FE/HE students in an increasingly interconnected, digital world and examine the potential implications of these expectations for teachers in the twenty-first century.'

Instructions

- Your essay should be between 800-1,000 words (excluding the list of references).
- The essay should be word-processed and formatted clearly (use 1.5 or 2 line spacing to help readability).
- Bring along a **printed copy of a first draft of your essay to the 'Introductory Session'**
- Retain a digital copy as you may need to make changes following discussions during the 'Introductory Session'.

There will be an element of self and peer-review based on your first draft of the essay. The academic induction essays will not be formally assessed or graded in any way and will not contribute to any form of assignment. Tutors will use the essays to indicate where the focus should be for future work.

Resources
To write your essay, you can draw upon any relevant resources you wish. However, we have included two texts (below) which will enable you to make a start. Three additional resources are also indicated – listed under the heading 'Other possible resources' at the end of this document. Please note that at this point, we are not expecting you to read and integrate a large number of books, articles or reports as you have both a limited word count and limited time. The main aim of this exercise is to enable you to reflect upon the processes of planning and writing a piece of academic text; we are not looking for experts in the use of ICT in teaching!

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TEXT 1 - Below is the summary (courtesy of M. Allardice, University of Dundee) of an Independent Committee of Inquiry into the impact on higher education of students' widespread use of Web 2.0 technologies.

The full report is available at-
HMSO. (2009). Higher *Education in a Web 2.0 World.* Available:
http://www.ictliteracy.info/rf.pdf/HigherEdweb20.pdf
[Accessed: 1 June, 2017]

Introduction
Today's learners live in a digital age. This implies access to, and use of, a range of Social Web tools and software that provide gateways to a multiplicity of interactive resources for information, entertainment and, not least, communication.

The key findings of the report are:
- The digital divide, the division between the digital 'haves' and 'have-nots', has not been entirely overcome and persists in several dimensions: in access to, and engagement with, technology; the capability of the technology; and in individual competence of the use of technology. Use of Web 2.0 technologies is nevertheless high and pervasive across all age groups
- Using Web 2.0 technologies leads to development of a new sense of communities of interest and networks, and also of a clear notion of boundaries in web space – for example, personal space (messages), group space (social networking sites such as Facebook) and publishing space (blogs and social media sites, such as YouTube).
- There is an area within the boundaries of the so-called group space that could be developed to support learning and teaching.
- The processes of engaging with Web 2.0 technologies develop a skill set that matches both to views on 21st century learning skills and to those on 21st century employability skills – communication, collaboration, creativity, leadership and technology proficiency.
- Information literacies, including searching, retrieving, critically evaluating information from a range of appropriate sources and also attributing it – represent a significant and growing problem area for students.

Learner expectations:
- Present-day students are heavily influenced by school methods of delivery so that shifts in educational practice there can be expected to impact on expectations of approaches in higher education
- Face-to-face contact with staff – the personal element in study – matters to students
- Imagining technology used for social purposes in a study context presents conceptual difficulties for learners as well as a challenge to their notions of space. They need demonstration, persuasion and room to experiment in this context
- Staff capability with ICT is a further dimension of the digital divide, and effective use of technology, that is, to enhance learning, is as much of an issue as practical operation, namely getting the technology to work
- Students' practical skills with ICT can be harnessed by staff to good effect in both domains – operation and effective use in delivery

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Tradition

Students are looking for traditional approaches, notably personal contact, in a modern setting, that is, web-supported. The bridge between Web 2.0 in social use and in learning is as yet only dimly perceived by students, and only a little more clearly by staff. The fact that it is perceived, however, is likely to act as a spur to its construction.

Diversity in the learner population

E-Learning incorporating Web 2.0 offers the sense of being a contributing member of a learning community, which is one of the hallmarks of higher education. For learners unable to participate in an actual community for some, or even all, of the time – notably part-time, distance and, increasingly, work-based – Web 2.0 may be a reasonable alternative.

A richer educational experience

Learning that is active – by doing – undertaken within a community and based on individual's interests, is widely considered to be the most effective. Driven by process rather than content, such an approach helps students become self-directed and independent learners. Web 2.0 is well suited to serving and supporting this type of learning.

Practice in schools

Practice is variable, but the type of approach to learning outlined above, for example, project and group-based supported by technology, appears to be in the ascendancy and so likely to condition expectation upon entry to higher education.

Open source materials and online universities

The growth in both open source materials and online universities increases the choice available to students of all ages and in all locations. Adoption of approaches to learning and teaching that take account of the disposition and attitudes of the student population are more likely to ensure UK higher education remains an attractive choice.

Skills development

There is a match between what are seen as 21st century learning skills, 21st century employability skills and those engendered by engagement with Web 2.0 – communication, participation, networking, sharing.

Report Recommendations
There are recommendations in two main areas: learner skills and staff skills

Area 1: Learner skills

It is recommended that:

- Universities take steps to keep abreast of the prior experience and expectations of their student body
- Universities ensure access to appropriate technology for all students and continue to provide for the development of their technical skills
- Universities, colleges and schools treat information literacies as a priority area and support all students so that they are able, amongst other things, to identify, search, locate, retrieve and, especially, critically evaluate information from the range of appropriate sources – web-based and other – and organise and use it effectively, attributed as necessary, in an appropriate medium
- Universities, colleges and schools also treat web awareness as a priority area and support all students so that they are able to participate in web-based activities and use web-based services on an informed basis
- Universities ensure that student understand the need for appropriate referencing strategies and adherence to copyright restrictions when using material from the Internet and other electronic resources. Aligned with plagiarism issues, this has become one of the problem areas when using Web 2.0 systems.

Area 2: Staff skills

It is recommended that:
Universities support staff to continue to reflect on research into learning so that they are able to make fully informed choices about their teaching and assessment methods

- Universities support staff to become proficient users of an appropriate range of
- technologies and skilled practitioners of e-pedagogy, incorporating both into initial staff training and CPD programmes
- Universities explore ways in which the tutor/student relationship might be developed based on the Web 2.0 skills and attitudes of students
- Universities provide ongoing support for staff to maintain the currency of their information literacies.

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TEXT 2 - Below is the executive summary* of a report into student experiences of technology. The full report is available at-
Conole, G., de Laat, M., Dillon, T. and Darby, J. (2006)
JISC LXP Student experiences of technologies Final report
Available:
http://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20140615041434/http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/elearningpedagogy/lxpprojectfinalreportdec06.pdf
Short URL: http://bit.ly/1r3tn5R
[Accessed: 1 June, 2017]

'JISC LXP Student experiences of technologies

1. Executive summary

The study yielded both expected and unexpected findings in terms of students' use of technologies. The expected findings are useful in terms of providing valuable up-to-date empirical evidence of students' current learning environment. The unexpected findings give a hint of the student learning environment of tomorrow and raise a host of important implications for policy and practice.

Across all subjects the students made extensive use of personally owned technologies including mobile phones, laptop computers, personal digital assistants and USB memory sticks. In terms of expected findings the study revealed that students are using a range of standard packages (Word, PowerPoint, etc) in creating and presenting learning artefacts and assignments, and for manipulation of textual and numerical data (Excel, statistical software). The Web is unequivocally the first port of call for students – with extensive examples across the study of how students are using search engines, dedicated subject-specific sites and ejournals to find information of relevance to their studies. What is surprising perhaps is the extent of this as a common practice amongst the students and the sophisticated ways in which they are finding and synthesising information and integrating across multiple sources of data. Similarly technologies are used extensively by students to communicate with fellow peers and tutors, with students demonstrating use of a variety of tools (email, MSN chat, skype, mobile phones, etc) to support a range of different communicative acts. Again the level and type of communication is notable – there is strong evidence of peer support and peer community, resonant with the rhetoric inherent in the idea of social networking and the world of Web 2.0. The key picture that emerges is that students are appropriating technologies to meet their own personal, individual needs – mixing use of general ICT tools and resources, with official course or institutional tools and resources. The above findings point to a profound shift in the way in which students are working and suggest a rich and complex inter-relationship between the individuals and the tools. The following eight factors emerge from the data in terms of the changing nature of the way students are working.

1. *Pervasive and integrated:* Students are using technologies extensively to find, manage and produce content. They use technologies to support all aspects of their study. Students are using tools in a combination of ways to suit individual needs. There is evidence of mixing and matching. They are comfortable with switching between media, sites, tools, content, etc. They said that technologies provide them with more flexibility in terms of being able to undertake learning anytime, anywhere.

2. *Personalised:* They appropriate the technologies to suit their own needs. They use the computer, the internet and books simultaneously. Their learning is interactive and multifaceted, and they use strategies such as annotation and adaptation of materials to meet their learning needs.

3. *Social:* Students are part of a wider, networked, community of peers. They are members of a range of communities of practice - to share resources, ask for help and peer assess.

4. *Interactive:* Students' perception of the nature and inherent worth of 'content' is changing: they have access to a rich variety of free material that is easily downloaded via the Internet. Students expect high quality, interactive materials with a preference for 'byte' sized and condensed forms of information that can easily reviewed anytime, anywhere and store on handheld devices. Content is no longer 'fixed' and 'valued', it is a starting point, something to interact with, to cut and paste, to adapt and remix.

5. *Changing skills set:* Students are demonstrating new skills in terms of harnessing the potential of technologies for their learning. These include developing new forms of evaluation skills and strategies (searching, restructuring, validating), which enable them to critique and make critical decisions about a variety of sources and content. Students are becoming sophisticated at finding and managing hybrid forms of information drawn from a multitude of traditional (text books), existing (Google search engines) and emerging (blogs, Wikipedia) sources.

6. *Transferability:* They see the PC as their central learning tool. They are used to having easy access to information (for travel, entertainment etc) and therefore have an expectation of the same for their courses. There is evidence of the transfer of practices of their use of technologies in other aspects of their lives to their learning context: for example MSN chat, Amazon, ebay and Skype.

7. *Time:* The concept of 'time' is changing – both in terms of expectation of information and results on demand. There is evidence that despite the fragmentation of the learning timetable, technological tools (email, mobile phone, MSN, Skype, WebCT) are mediating and allowing students to remain connected and synchronised.

8. *Changing working patterns:* New working practices using an integrated range of tools are emerging. The use of these tools is changing the way they gather, use and create knowledge. There is a shift in the nature of the basic skills with a shift from lower to higher levels of Blooms' taxonomy, necessary to make sense of their complex technologically enriched learning environment. Students are evidently comfortable with using technology and see it as integral to their learning. They are generally sophisticated users, using technologies in a variety of different ways to support different aspects of their learning. They are critically aware of the pros and cons of the use of different technologies and 'vote with their feet' – i.e. they don't use technologies just for the sake of it – there needs to be a purpose and clear personal benefit. They have an expectation of being able to access up to date and relevant information and resources and see this as vital. They don't see the technology as anything special; but see it as just another tool to support their learning.'

Other possible resources

Further Education Learning Technology Action Group (2014). *Paths forward to a digital future for Further Education and Skills.*
Available: http://feltag.org.uk/ [Accessed: 1 June, 2017]

Education Technology Action Group (2015). *Our Reflection*.
Available: http://etag.report/ [Accessed: 1 June, 2017]

JISC (2012). *Learning in a Digital Age*
Available: http://repository.jisc.ac.uk/5993/1/JISCLearninginaDigitalAge.pdf [Accessed: 1 June, 2017]