

ESCalate Developing Pedagogy and Practice 2010/11 Grant Project Interim Report

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Project Title Balancing the demands of in-school placement with out-of-school study

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‘Balancing the demands of in-school placement with out-of-school study’

<http://escalate.ac.uk/8140>

Interim Project Report

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Context to the study:

Our project aims to explore the affordances of mobile technologies by supporting students writing their postgraduate projects when they are in a placement setting. It will:

- a) Capture the stages in student writing over their placement by the use of filmed individual research diaries (via flip cams).
- b) Scaffold student critical thinking by having four 24 hour ‘key intervention points’ where students and staff will have a critical text dialogue tutor-student; student to student peer groups; student to tutor. Facilitated by using txttools (www.txttools.co.uk), students will use their own mobile phones.
- c) We will capture previously ‘invisible’ aspects of our students’ lives outside the classroom.
- d) By analysis of the video diaries and focus group interviews we will identify a framework for key interventions that will provide staff supporting students in other contexts with insights into the key ‘tipping point interventions’ that make a difference to the student experience.

Trainee student teachers can struggle with their placement/academic work balance and rush their research project at the end, and have reported disappointment with their grades. They may also struggle with making informed ethical decisions outside the formal classroom, an issue identified by Wishart (2010). Students also find it difficult to develop the level of academic skills required by the assignments, including research skills and critical review of appropriate literature. There is very limited time to teach these skills as students are mainly out on placement.

Key intervention points were mapped according to the students’ school experience and

academic preparation for the project, and we posted key readings onto the course VLE, and engaged the students via txttools, a medium for both sending and receiving SMS messages. These key readings and supported 'chat via text' focused on very short bursts of information over a 24 hour period, aimed to support student writing over the period. Thus the students had the opportunity for critical engagement with their peers and tutors at key points on their placement experience. The project team thus hoped to scaffold the preparation of their academic work.

The key intervention points were triggered by four specially selected readings. The topics of these were:

February 2011: Scaffolding subject knowledge

Reference: Webb, M.E. (2002) "Pedagogical reasoning: issues and solutions for the teaching and learning of ICT in secondary schools" *Education and Information Technologies*, Volume 7, Number 3, 237-255

March 2011: The teacher as researcher

Reference: Bryan, H., Carpenter, C. and Hoult, S., (2010) *The student teacher as researcher* in Bryan, H., Carpenter, C. and Hoult, S., (2010) *Learning and teaching at M-level: a guide for student teachers*. London: Sage

April 2011: Developing a pedagogical approach to your subject

Reference: Hughes, I and Kennewell, S (2007). *Developing your ICT capability and knowledge for teaching* in Kennewell, S., Connell, A., Edwards, A., Hammond, M. and Wickens, C. *A Practical Guide to Teaching ICT in the Secondary School*. Abingdon: Routledge

May 2011: Evaluating projects, a reflective approach

Reference: Pollard, A. (2008). *Reflective Teaching*. London: Continuum. 3rd Edition (extract from)

The 13 Information and Technology trainees were on their 16-week long school placement when these interventions took place. This meant that they did not come into the university at all, except in the Easter holidays. The interventions were held from 9am until 9am the following day and tasks were given to trainees by text at 9am, 12pm and 3pm. Some tasks involved commenting on an aspect of the reading, and others involved reflecting on others' texts. The number of participants varied for each session, as did the times of day that they were able to participate. However, all of the trainees participated in at least one of the four sessions, and over half of the trainees participated in all four. Trainees were divided into groups, and texts were forwarded to other trainees in their group. Initially, the groups were set in terms of the topic they had chosen for their assignment, but after the second session, the groups were reconfigured to contain an even mix of "keen participators". Forwarding of messages did not take place between 6pm and 8am although messages could be received; this was to ensure trainees did not feel that their out-of-work time was being overly invaded. When messages were forwarded, they would not have the originator's number so were essentially anonymised.

In addition to the texting interventions, the research team were interested in whether the additional support during the placement would make a difference to the timing of student writing up of their major projects. The previous cohort had reported 'rushing' (course evaluation

2010) the writing at the end of their placement. The students in the current cohort (ie participants in our pilot) were loaned Flip Video Cams so that they could capture the when they decided to write (formally or informally eg notes compared to drafts) during their placement. In this way, we hope to capture previously 'invisible' aspects of our students' lives outside the classroom.

By analysis of the video diaries and focus group interviews we want to identify a framework for key interventions that will provide staff supporting students in other contexts with insights into the key 'tipping point interventions' that make a difference to the student experience.

ESCALATE project: Evaluation activities report, June 2011

The following evaluation activities have been carried out:

- The students completed a questionnaire at the beginning of the project (Appendix A)
- The tutor was interviewed at the end of the teaching period (8/6/11)
- The students took part in a focus group at the end of the teaching period (8/6/11)

The questionnaire responses have been collated, and are available as an Appendix to this report. Information provided was used to inform the running of the project, and will be considered when the full analysis of the evaluation data is conducted.

The tutor interview and the student focus group have yet to be transcribed, but the following notes were made after the sessions, and summarise some of the key points made.

Tutor feedback from the interview

It was felt that Txttools was not completely the right system to use to achieve the aims of the project – it didn't always do what the tutor wanted. The tutor had to mediate the messages coming into the system, and forward them to the other students in the group. Messages were restricted to 160 characters, and if they were longer than this they would be truncated, and appeared in separate messages which were out of sequence. It was thus very time intensive when the interventions happened. It was therefore not sophisticated enough and restrictive. She felt that the same goals could probably have been achieved using Moodle or Adobe Connect (but they wouldn't be mobile solutions).

She found the experience "interesting", and said it was a valuable way of engaging with the students. She would repeat the project, but would like to investigate how to automate the forwarding of the messages to the students. She would however embark on more planning in advance, and have the readings digitized and made available in advance, and would devise more tasks around them.

Despite the issues raised, there were a number of successes. In their assignments (which have now been marked) nearly all the students referred to the literature given. She didn't think they'd have read all the articles otherwise. The students' academic ability was varied, and because the comments forwarded to each other were anonymous, she thought that the students felt more able to make a contribution and benefited from others' contributions. The main benefit of writing the students' reflections as SMS messages was that they had to write a

message within 160 characters; this enforced conciseness, which was something that the tutor wanted the students to practise. Writing a short text message did not put the less academic students at a disadvantage – it was something that they could all do.

Some examples of the trainees' SMS contributions are given in the figure/box below:

Example question (Session 2):

p 64 Do you need to be good at theory to be a good teacher? Pring states "Like it or not we are all theorists and all practitioners" Do you agree? State yes or no and then justify your response.

Some examples of the trainees' responses

"I agree as reflective theory and practice inform each other which can provide a better understanding of teachers (themselves) and their classroom practices"

"I agree as teaching allows the putting of theory into practice. It is only when you do this do you realise how well you understand the theory."

"To be a good teacher theory is important, applying the knowledge u have gained in ur classroom then reflecting, can help u shape ur classroom practice"

Student feedback from the focus group

The focus group was attended by 11 of the students (2 were not able to participate to the end and left part way through).

Most students had good and bad experiences of the project, and what some students liked, others didn't. However, many constructive suggestions for making changes to what was done were given, resulting in lots of feedback on how digital technologies (mobile, PC, social networking etc.) could facilitate and support students academically on school placements.

The text tools system

The way the system operated caused some problems which took getting used to. If a message sent was longer than 160 characters, it would be split into more than one message, and these often came through on their mobiles out of sequence. Also, messages were anonymous, which they didn't like because they couldn't see who they were from. Over time, it was difficult to tell which text referred to which intervention.

The use of text messages

Several students didn't like or found it cumbersome to send text messages. Because they were

restricted to 160 characters, many students couldn't tell from their phones how many characters they'd input, so many resorted to writing out messages by hand or typing them up, counting the characters and then creating and sending the text message. Some didn't like to receive the messages on their phones, viewing it as an invasion on their private device. Others liked the immediacy of the messages, which if they came at a convenient time, they could respond to. Others found this immediacy annoying. Some found responding via text message restrictive (because of the 160 character limit), but others found this beneficial as they learned to send concise responses.

Timing of the interventions

Most students experienced problems with the timing of the interventions. Because each intervention was carried out over a 24 hour period from 9am, it was not always convenient for them to participate. If it occurred on a day when they were not in school, they could easily respond. If they were at school, it was usually impossible to respond during the day. If they left it until the evening, sometimes other things (family crises, other commitments, having no credit etc.) got in the way of them being able to respond. One student said she used to get up early in the morning so that she could participate before the end of the 9am deadline. Several felt that it would be more successful if the interventions were timed to coincide with the days they were at university, when it would have been easier for them to participate.

Timescale of the interventions

Because of the issue of timings for some, some would prefer the timescale to respond to be extended beyond 24 hours to give them more opportunity to participate. Others liked the fact that it gave a small window of time to engage in the task and had a deadline, because it made you focus on the task, or because otherwise they might not get round to it.

Provision of academic support

Many students said it did help. Many said they read the readings, which they probably wouldn't have done otherwise. Three said that they started to prepare their assignment earlier during the placement as a result, rather than leaving it until the end. It helped to focus in on the academic side. They enjoyed being able seeing other students' responses, although they didn't know who they were from. Some incorporated some of the text messages into their assignment. One said they used comments and related them to the literature and used other people's comments, and in the process it made them think at a deeper level. One thought however that they could have been given the questions and discussed them in class.

About creating video diaries

Most of the students said they didn't fully understand why they were given the Flipcams, and what they should use them for (not many students said that they used them because of this). Some students expressed reluctance to want to film themselves. One said it would be good to have the opportunity to be able to upload and share their videos. Another said it would be helpful to have had a demo of what we could do with the Flipcam.

Debate about technologies used

There was much debate about how the project aims could be achieved using different technologies. Having a series of anonymous (and sometimes out of sequence) text messages, made it difficult to see the overall picture – there was no thread to the messages. But communicating by text message was convenient in the sense that they could do it when they could from their mobile, and they didn't have to go into a PC-based system and look for the tasks, because they were sent to them.

Some said using Facebook would be better (because they used that a lot), whereas for others, this was not a good solution because they didn't use it (the students have already set up their own Facebook group for the course, so they are already using that of their own accord). Some suggested using a combination of technologies, such as text messages and emails, or text messages and Facebook. The ideal solution would be a combination of having SMS notification, but dialogue via something else more suitable to be able to see the thread of comments and who they were from.

Positive comments

- Enabled them to keep in touch with coursemates.
- Liked being able to see other students' viewpoints.
- Good idea.
- Helped with assignments.
- It gave them ideas of how mobile phones can and can't work in education.
- It would be a good tool to make us reflect on our teaching practice and share experiences.

Negative comments

- Invasion of free time (this only happened in the first intervention – after that the timing was changed so the messages went out at 9am, after one student complained in the questionnaire about getting messages in the evening).
- Because it wasn't compulsory, I didn't do it.
- Already have too many different things to do.

Conclusion

There were some issues with the technologies chosen, but it is also difficult to come up with a 'one size fits all' solution that would suit all the students, as they all had their preferences about the technologies that they are comfortable with and use.

Early Project outputs:

Sentance, S, Holley, D & Bradley, C
Supporting education students on school placements with mobile devices
ALT_C 6/7/8 September 2011

Sentance, S, Holley, D & Bradley, C
Texting Trainees: supporting academic writing on placement
ITTE conference

Keele University
5/7 July 2011

Holley, D Sentance, S, & Bradley, C
'Because it wasn't compulsory, I didn't do it.': challenges in supporting students via mobile technology
Anglia Ruskin University
Staff Research Conference
Friday 2nd September 2011

References:

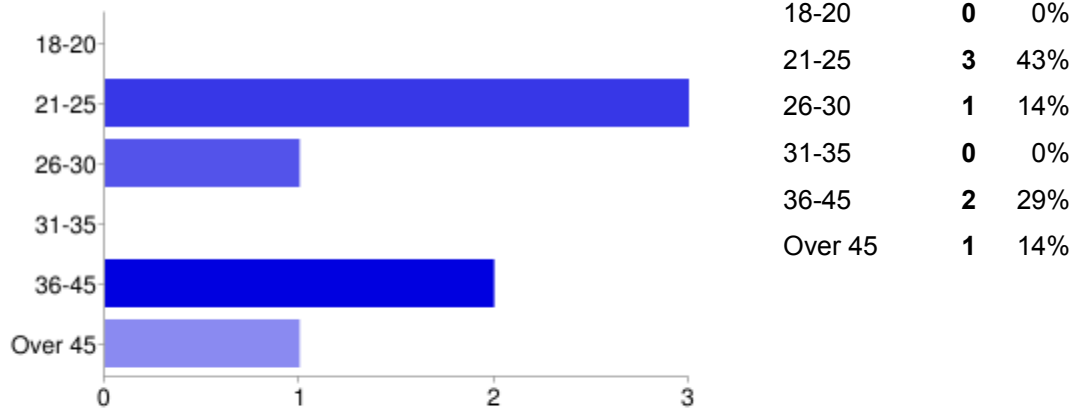
Wishart, J. (2010). in Brown E (ed) Education in the wild: contextual; and location-based mobile learning in action; STELLAR Network of Excellence, Learning Sciences Institute; University of Nottingham 2010

Appendix: Student questionnaire responses

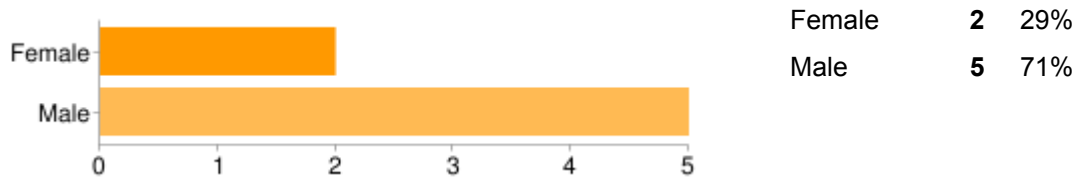
The students

7 students completed the questionnaire.

Age



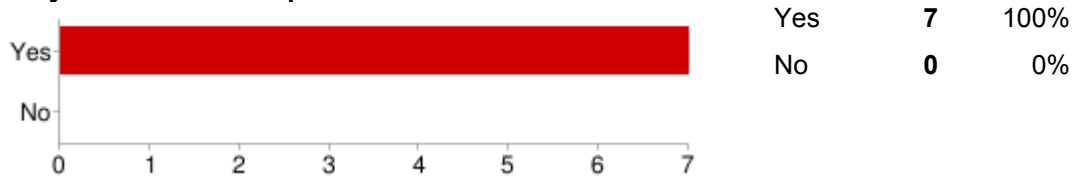
Gender



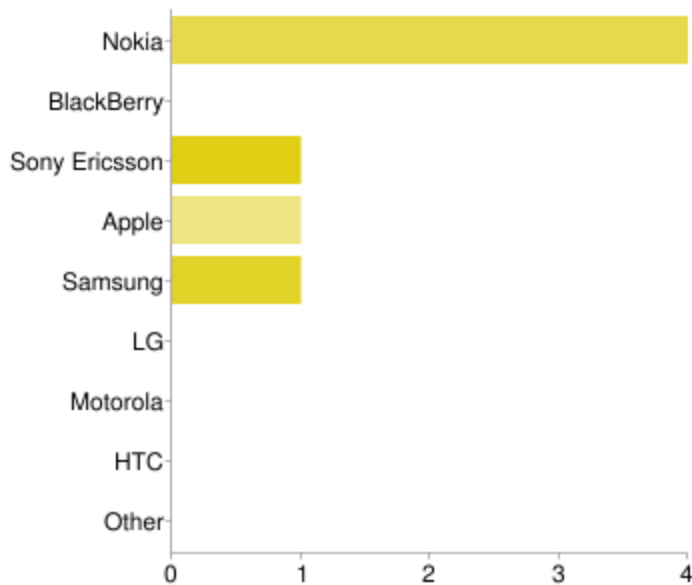
Summary: [71%5 out of 7](#)

Mobile phones

Do you have a mobile phone?



If so, what type of mobile phone do you have?

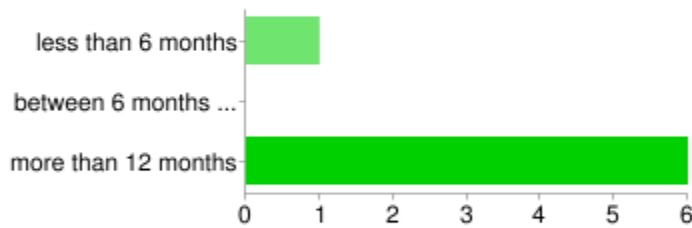


Nokia	4	57%
BlackBerry	0	0%
Sony Ericsson	1	14%
Apple	1	14%
Samsung	1	14%
LG	0	0%
Motorola	0	0%
HTC	0	0%
Other	0	0%

What is the model of your mobile phone?

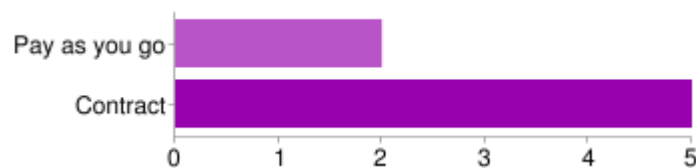
Apple iPhone 3G
 Samsung Tocolite
 Nokia 6250
 Nokia 5220
 Nokia N73
 Nokia No idea!
 Sony Ericsson X10 Mini

How long have you had this phone for?



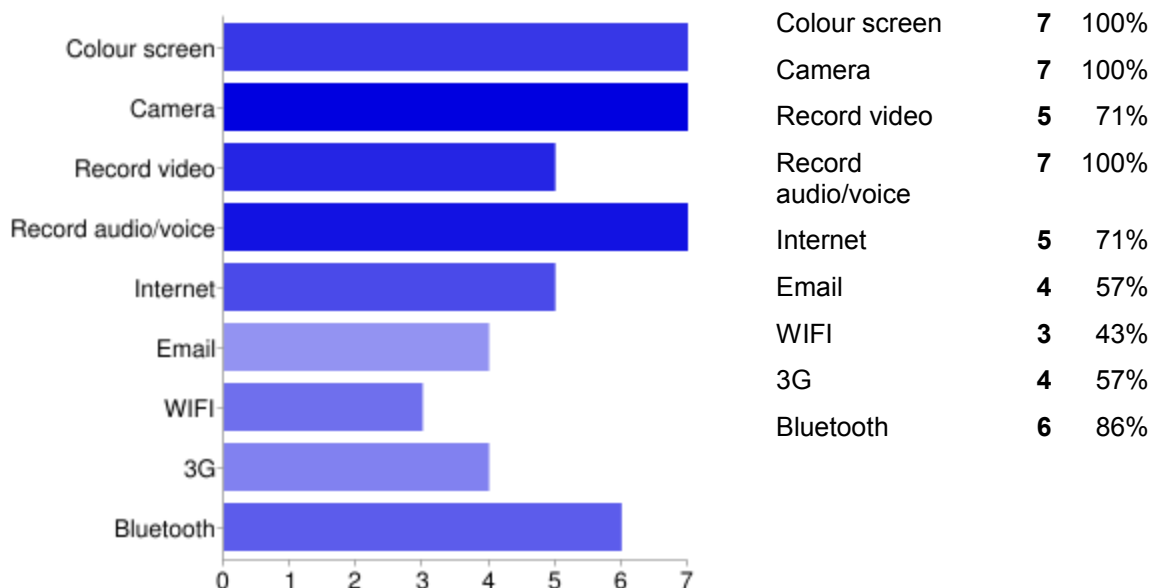
less than 6 months	1	14%
between 6 months and 12 months	0	0%
more than 12 months	6	86%

Do you 'pay as you go' or have a contract with a provider?

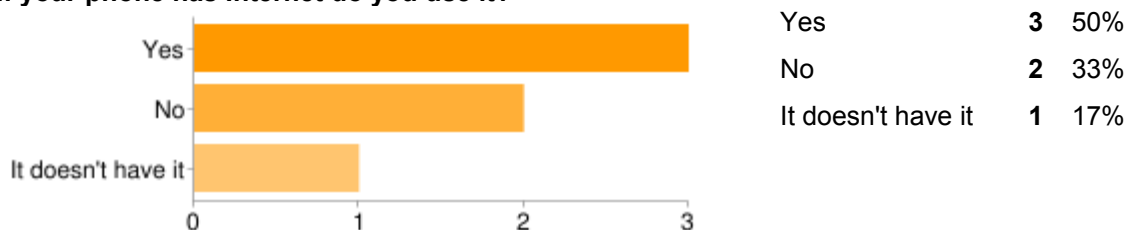


Pay as you go	2	29%
Contract	5	71%

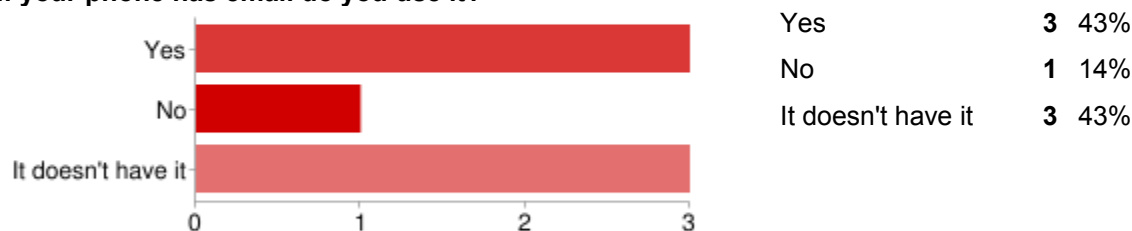
Please tick the features of your phone



If your phone has Internet do you use it?



If your phone has email do you use it?



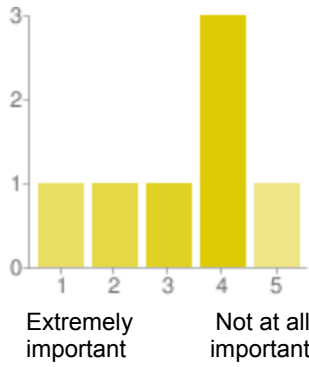
Summary:

They all have a mobile phone. 5 have their phone on a contract. Nokia handsets are the most common (4 students). The majority (6) said their phones were more than 12 months old and only 1 student had a new phone that was less than 6 months old. The age of their phones is reflected in the features available: They all have colour screens, camera and can record audio/voice, but only 5 can record video, 5 have internet access and 4 email. 6 have Bluetooth, 4 3G and 3 WIFI.

Of the 5 students who could access the internet on their phones, only 3 said that they used it. Of the 4 students who could access email on their phones, only 3 said that they used it (interestingly it was the same 3 students who used both internet and email).

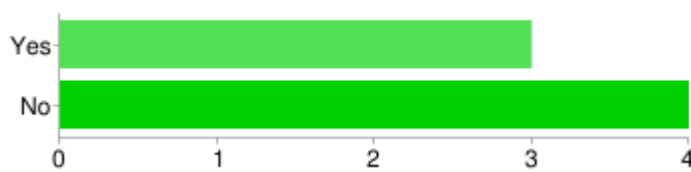
Learning

How much is the ability to learn at any time and in any place important to you?



1 - Extremely important	1	14%
2	1	14%
3	1	14%
4	3	43%
5 - Not at all important	1	14%

Do you currently use your mobile to help with your learning?



Yes	3	43%
No	4	57%

If yes, what do you use it for?

Student 1: To access the internet.

Student 3: Taking photographs, typing in short reminders, contacting people

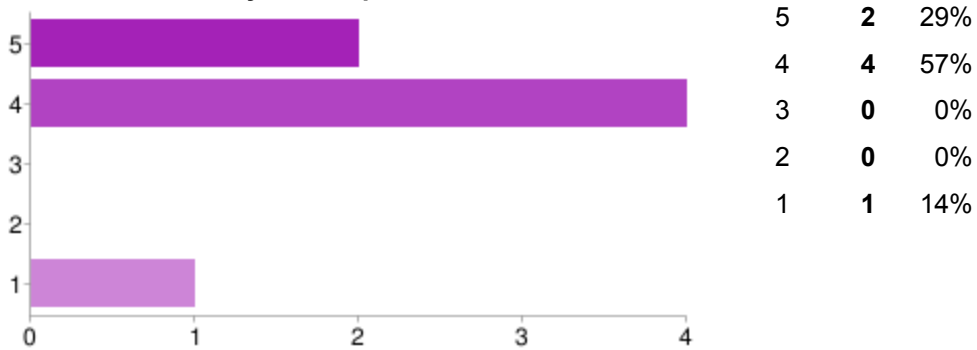
Student 4: Time management, reminders, calendar. Playing short games for a break.

Summary: Students generally had a negative view towards being able to learn at any time and in any place: 4 thought it wasn't important, 1 rated neutrally in the middle, and 2 thought it was important. 3 students said that they used their mobiles for learning, and gave examples.

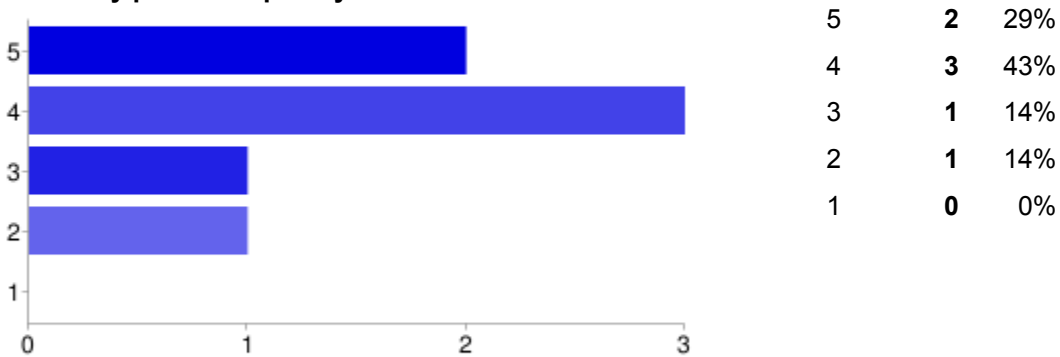
Attitudes to and use of mobile phones

The following questions are about your attitude to your mobile phone. Please select an answer between 5 (Strongly agree) and 1 (Strongly disagree) to the following questions:

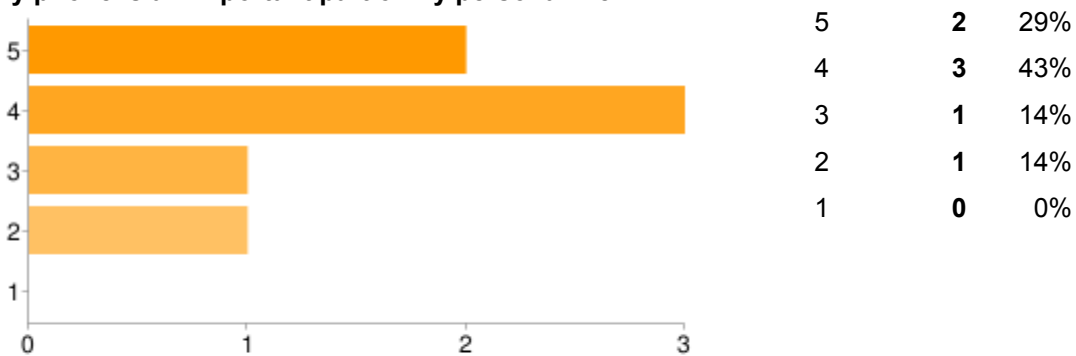
I'd be lost without my mobile phone



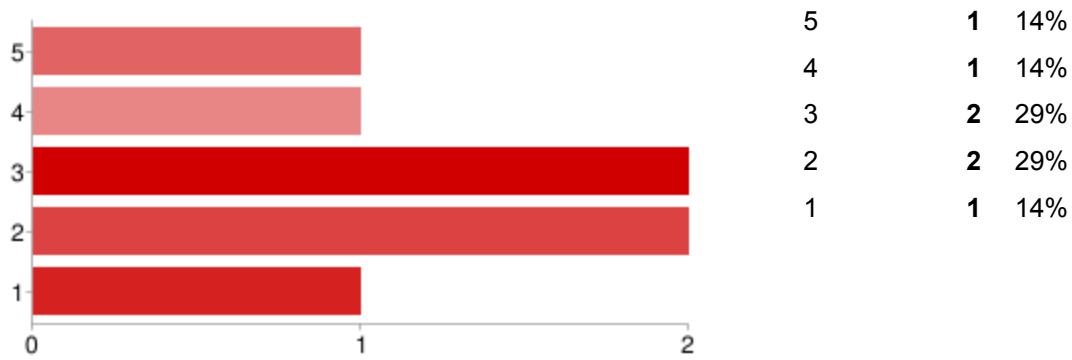
I check my phone frequently



My phone is an important part of my personal life



My phone is an important part of my professional (teaching/academic) life

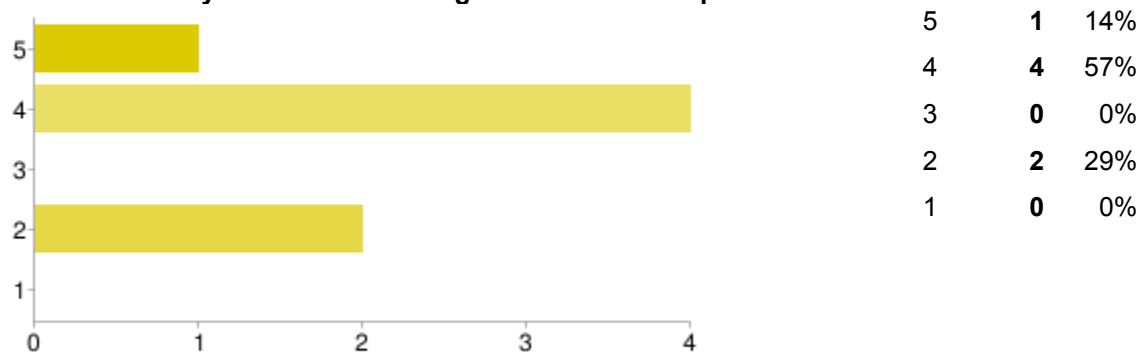


Summary: 6 of the students feel strongly (3 very strongly) that they would be lost without their mobile phone, and the other student strongly disagreed. 5 check their phone frequently. Whilst a high proportion of students think that their phone is an important part of their personal life, they do not see it as being an important part of their professional (teaching/academic) life: 5 thought it was important for their social life, but only 2 for their professional life. This suggests that the majority see their mobile phone as a personal device (and therefore may not readily use it in their professional life).

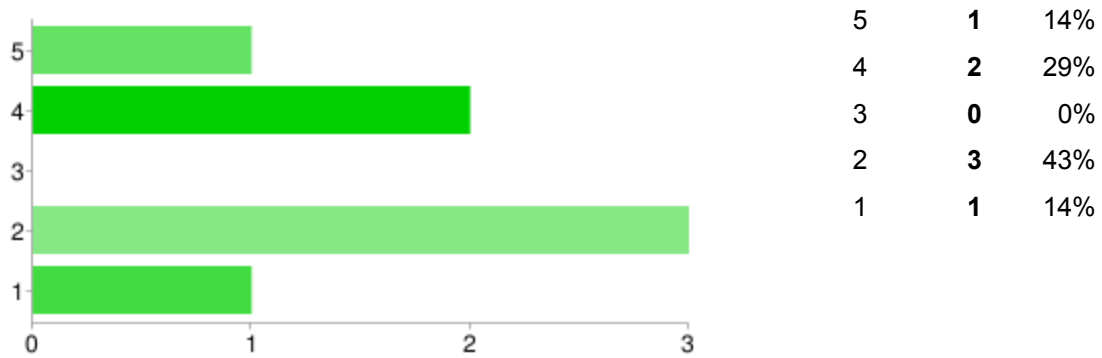
Questions about university study and placement

In your PGCE you are required to write assignments for the university whilst working full-time on a teaching placement in school. Please select an answer between 5 (Strongly agree) and 1 (Strongly disagree) to the following questions:

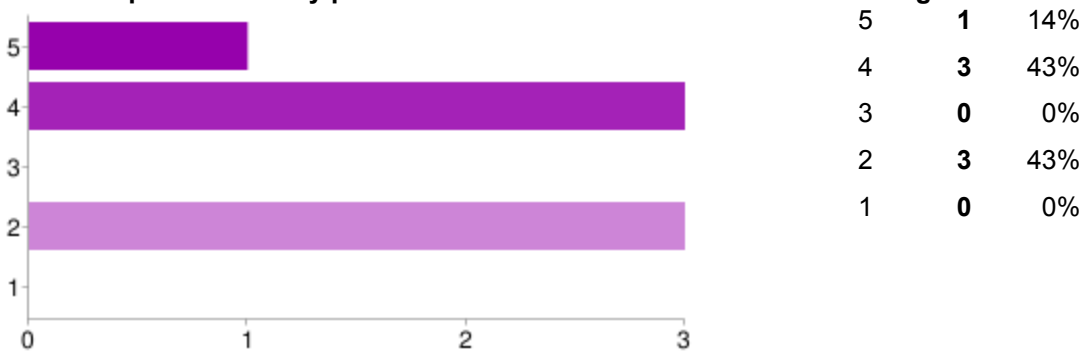
I tend to leave any work towards assignments as late as possible



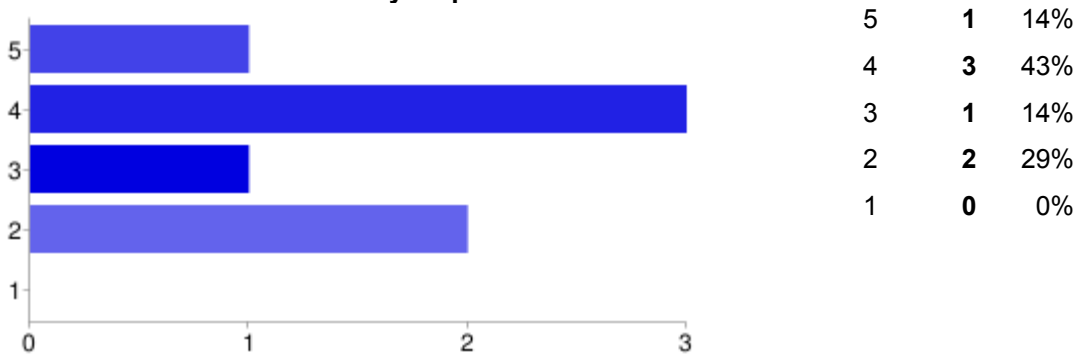
I find the balance between university and school life very difficult to manage



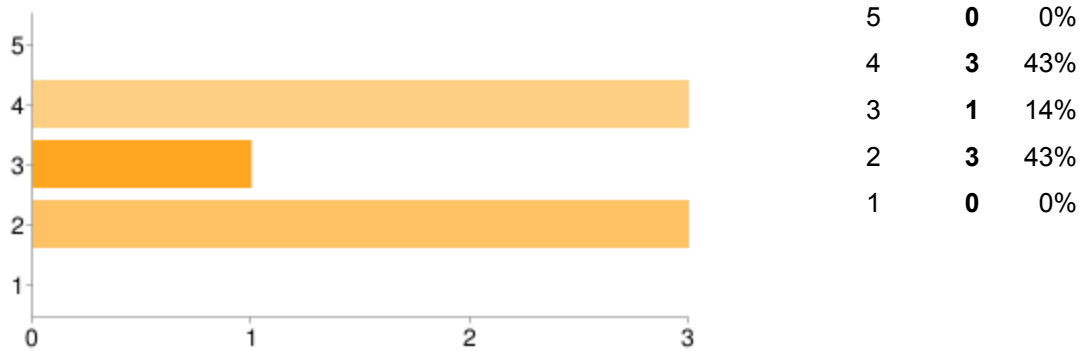
I feel the experience on my placement will enable me to write a better assignment



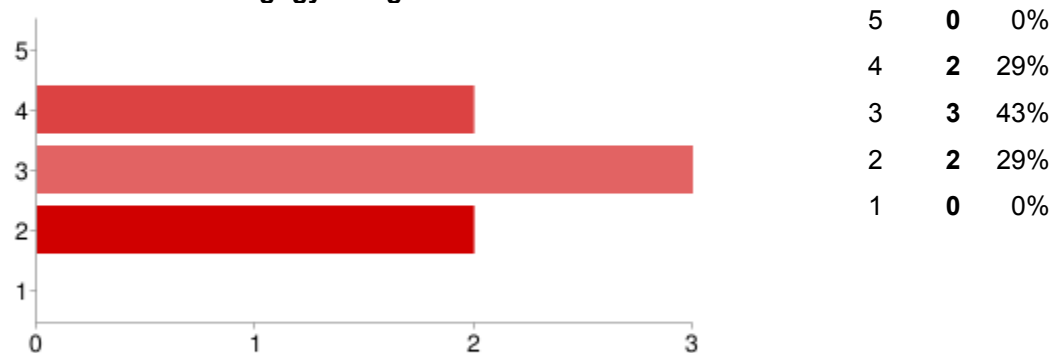
I feel isolated from the university on placement



I feel confident with academic writing



I feel that carrying out tasks using my mobile phone will help me with writing the Curriculum and Pedagogy Assignment



Summary: 5 students agreed that they tended to leave any work towards assignments as late as possible (1 strongly agreed). Students were split about finding the balance between university and school life very difficult to manage: 3 agreed it was difficult, but 5 didn't agree. 5 students agreed that the experience on their placement will enable them to write a better assignment, and 3 disagreed. The majority (4) agreed that they feel isolated from the university on placement. Views on feeling confident with academic writing were split: 3 agreed and 3 disagreed (1 had a neutral view). Views were also split about the concept that carrying out tasks using their mobiles will help with writing the Curriculum and Pedagogy Assignment: 2 agreed, 2 disagreed, but 3 chose the middle option, which was neither agreeing nor disagreeing, so were maybe undecided. This issue will be followed up in the focus group.

Please add any other comments you have about the proposed project.

Student 3: Am looking forward to it - sounds fun!

Student 4: I think that texts would be good for reminding students to do things, but because my phone is kind of more of a social thing, I really resent getting 7 or 8 text messages in a row when i'm out having a pint.

Student 5: I don't know if my phone has internet. I have never had the need to find out.

Summary: One student has made a very positive comment, and one is expressing concerns about text messages interfering with their social life. The third students' comment doesn't relate to how they view the project.