



# Student Success Toolbox Project

## Project Overview

**James Brunton, Mark Brown, Ann Cleary, Eamon Costello, Lorraine Delaney, Seamus Fox, Jennifer Gilligan, Lisa O'Regan & Jamie Ward**

**National Institute for Digital Learning, Dublin City University**

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Authors can be contacted at:

T: +353 1 700 5329

Email: [james.brunton@dcu.ie](mailto:james.brunton@dcu.ie)

Web: [www.studentsuccess.ie](http://www.studentsuccess.ie)

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**Project Title:**

Student Success Toolbox for Flexible Learners: Supporting Transitions from Thinking About Study to the First Weeks

**Project Website**

This project's website can be found at [www.studentsuccess.ie](http://www.studentsuccess.ie). This website is being used to disseminate project information and publications and facilitate national and international discussions on the project, specifically through the use of the linked Flexible Learner Success twitter account @FLSuccess.

**Project Overview:*****Introduction***

The project seeks to address the problem of effective transitions and the foundations for student success during the initial stages of the study lifecycle with a specific focus on flexible learners. In the context of this project a broad definition is adopted of flexible learners, which includes adult learners engaged in part-time and online/distance learning. Enhancing retention and completion rates of this group of flexible learners is a significant problem both globally and within the Irish context.

The particular focus of this project is on supporting flexible learners through key transitions in the early stages of the study lifecycle: from thinking about study, making choices, the registration process and through to the first few weeks. A basic premise of the project is that the foundations for student success start early in the study lifecycle, and that insufficient attention has been given in the literature and within institutions to the importance of the period before flexible learners formally commence their study. A related underlying assumption is that this crucial transition period may be enhanced by the availability of appropriately designed digital readiness and preparation tools, which help to scaffold both prospective students and those about to embark on part time or online/distance study for the first time.

***Project Plan***

There are five phases to this project.

- Phase One involved the project establishment, including formalising the project team, partner agreements and scope of the work packages.
- Phase Two involved an analysis of relevant literature and current digital readiness tools available internationally to support successful transitions during initial stages of the study lifecycle for flexible learners. The main deliverable of this phase is an analysis of the digital tools adopted internationally to enhance transitions to study for this unique sub population of learners.
- Phase Three involved building on the above synthesis to develop a strategically targeted suite of research-informed digital readiness tools. While they will have wider application across the sector, the tools will focus on facilitating adult learners who are transitioning to part-time undergraduate study. The major deliverable from this phase was the development of a toolbox of eight digital tools that can be used and/or adapted by other institutions in the Higher Education

sector to support student success at this crucial period of the study lifecycle. The final selection, design and appropriateness of the digital readiness tools was informed by the analysis of the literature and institutional analysis completed in Phase Two.

- Phase Four involved a series of pilot evaluations of the digital tools across the partner institutions. Based on feedback gathered during this evaluation phase, the digital tools were adapted/augmented to ensure that they are fit for purpose.
- Phase Five has produced a Guide for Supporting Flexible Learners, which will provide guidance for institutions and discipline teams on how to effectively deploy the suite of digital readiness tools. Another key deliverable of this phase is a series of workshops delivered in different higher education institutions on how to support transitions for flexible learners.

The eight tools can be accessed through the project website (<http://studentsuccess.ie/the-toolbox/>):

<b>Am I Ready for Study?</b>	<b>How Much Work is it?</b>	<b>Who can I ask?</b>	<b>My Computer Skills</b>
<b>My First Assignment</b>	<b>Get Ready for Success</b>	<b>Study Tips for Me</b>	<b>Online Orientation</b>

### ***Tool 1: Am I Ready for Study?***

With the opening tool, prospective flexible learners are presented with the opportunity to reflect and self-assess if they are ready to commit to online study. This quick quiz is comprised of six sections addressing the following relevant topics: Previous Study, Work and Family, Study Intentions, Study Skills, Computer Skills and Work Habits. After answering each question personalised feedback is provided, and upon completion of the quiz every prospective learner is provided with an overall summary of their results and further personalised feedback. Here, each person is either informed they are ready for online study or encouraged to access the provided resource links to discover how they could enhance their readiness to succeed as a flexible learner.

### ***Tool 2: How Much Work is it?***

This second tool provides a self-reflective ‘Calculator’ where prospective students are supported in thinking about the amount of time they spend on different activities during a typical week and how much spare time they might have to allocate to study. The calculator enables people to self-assess whether balancing study with their existing life, work and family commitments is realistically achievable. In completing the tool each person is provided with tips on how to most accurately estimate how they currently spend their time under the sections Work, Family, Household, Hobbies, Leisure and Sleep. On completion of the

exercise people are given feedback on whether their personal circumstances are conducive to embarking on further study.

### ***Tool 3: Who can I ask?***

The 'Who can I ask?' tool offers prospective flexible learners the opportunity to think about their support network and how they might garner support to help them successfully complete their studies. Through a series of information slides, users are made aware of how they can seek support from Friends, Family, Employers, Universities and Other Students. In addition, examples of student scenarios and how they were supported through their studies can be accessed by clicking on quotes presented throughout the tool. Furthermore advice is offered on how to deal with a lack of support.

### ***Tool 4: My Computer Skills: Am I Computer Ready to Learn?***

Through the guidance of a student narrator, prospective flexible learners are informed of the necessary computer skills needed in higher education. They are also informed of the technology they will need, and the computer services offered by colleges. Four students' stories can also be accessed, which entail flexible learners' first interactions with email services, online reading materials, Word and Powerpoint. A computer skills quiz is also offered within this tool, allowing users to self-assess their current level of computer skills. Three different navigation pathways are available through this tool pending on the user's previous experience with computer technology. Online services to assist students in improving their computer skills are also flagged.

### ***Tool 5: My First Assignment***

Through the guidance of a student narrator, prospective flexible learners navigate through a narrative relating to what it is like to plan out and develop a first assignment in higher education. Advice on how to start an assignment, develop a plan, break down a research question is also provided, with key elements within a plan being presented. Additionally a series of student orientated quotes are readily accessible throughout the tool in order to give users a further sense of what it is like to tackle your first assignment in higher education. Four different navigation pathways are available through this tool pending on the user's previous experience with developing higher education study skills.

### ***Tool 6: Get Ready to Learn***

This tool is a five week online course that provides prospective flexible learners with key messages about how to prepare for studying at higher education level as a flexible learner. This tool incorporates a number of the other tools within its structure, in order to aid prospective learners in assessing their readiness for higher education, calculating how much time they have to study, examining what supports they have in their lives, learning about

necessary computer skills, and also about the study skills required to study successfully. Additional content (text, audio and video), activities and facilitated online discussion forums, unique to this tool are also used to help prepare prospective learners.

### ***Tool 7: Study Tips for Me***

This tool is designed to provide support for flexible learners from other flexible learners. The site would be based on a Tumblr platform, and would address topics such as developing a healthy study/life balance. Each student would be free to post on the site and it is intended that materials posted would be generic and beneficial for any flexible learner rather than course specific content appearing on the site. Through encouraging interaction between students in this manner it is thought it will benefit all students in overcoming challenges and developing suitable plans for study.

### ***Tool 8: Online Orientation***

As an online orientation, at the beginning of the academic year, would necessarily be unique to that programme or institution this tool takes a different form to the other seven tools. This tool is created as a guide for those who wish to create an online orientation. This guide describes the elements that should be present in an effective online orientation, gives examples of different approaches to including that element in an orientation and allows users of the tool to build up a plan for how they would create an online orientation for their programme or institution.

**For more information relating to the Student Success Toolbox project please contact [james.brunton@dcu.ie](mailto:james.brunton@dcu.ie)**