

What are the factors that encourage and inhibit student engagement in online activities, such as e-tivities?

# Project

## Aims:

- Explore the reasons behind variable student response
- Identify factors that encourage/inhibit student engagement

## Context:

- Waterside
- Blended/ Hybrid learning: new pedagogical normal
- Mixed success to date
- Varied design & response



**Initial focus:** CfAP's B.L. e-tivities on academic writing

# Change of focus

**Actual results:** no differentiation/ general confusion:

"Oh we get online tests" [sounds surprised]

"I don't think it's the same thing"

"Yeah, well it is submitting essays online."

"Yeah... that will be just be is it Turnitin or that would be done..."

"Yeah I think so, blogs and Turnitin..."

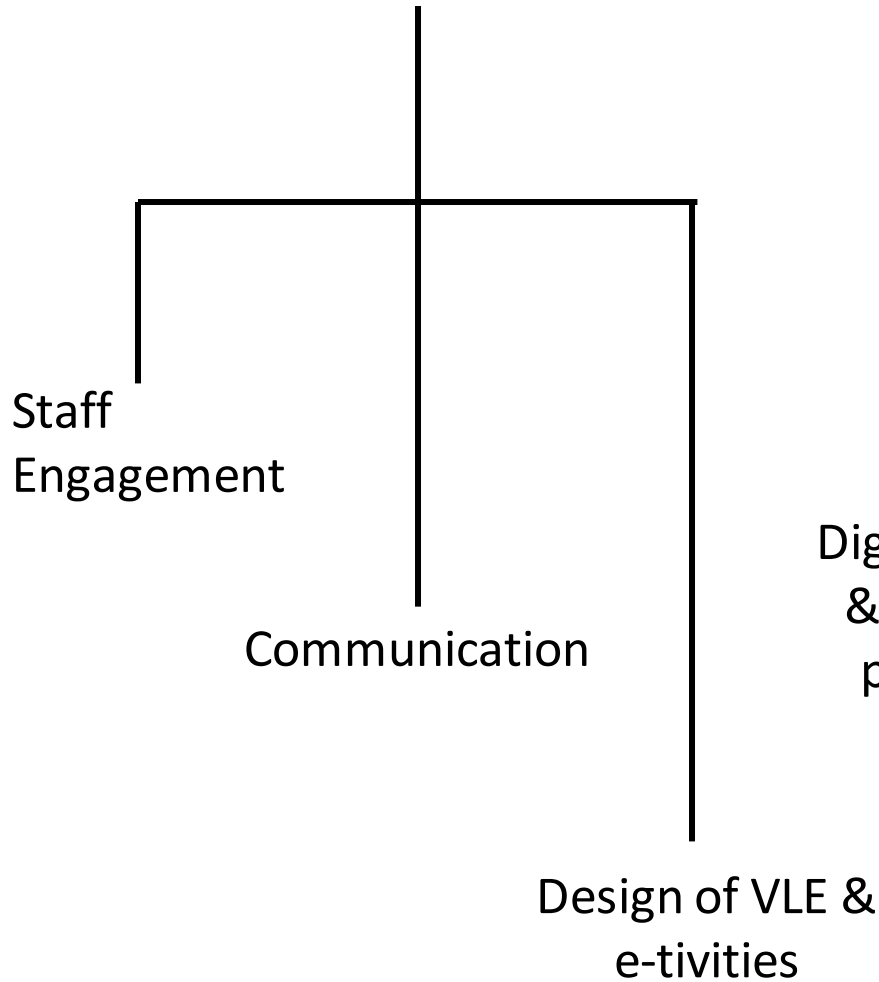
"By blended do you mean classroom based and online?"

# Method

- Qualitative:
  - 5 x student focus groups  
(By students with students)
  - 1 x staff focus group (CfAP)
- Mixed sample population  
(Cross-school: SOTA, SOH, SOE, SocSci, SciTech; mixed demographic)
- Total students: 30
- Total staff: 10
- Inductive Thematic Analysis (undertaken by student researchers)

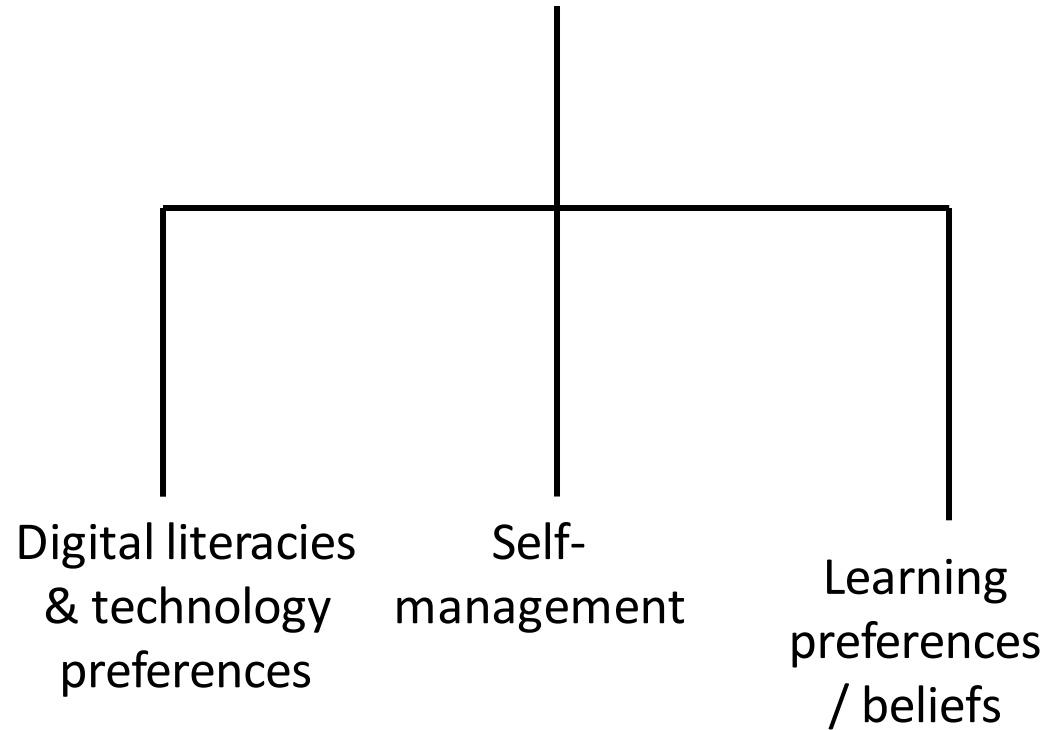
# Conditions

for Blended Learning



# Factors

that impact Blended Learning



# Staff engagement

“I like the fact that especially with [staff name removed] when he uploads every single one of his lectures and it is all Microsoft power point format and you just get it easily ...that you know works well ...”  
“But that’s the simplest part of the whole website.”  
“Yeah.. But it works well.”  
“But like it takes the least effort.”

“It is teachers avoiding teaching. So they are just like... because they don’t want to turn up to class they are just sending you some activities.”

“yes it can be a lazy way of teaching or people think that it is a lazy way of teaching”

“If there were some feedback... otherwise we can’t learn from it and improve”

“and did anything ever come of that [the e-tivity set]?”  
All: “No, No, no”  
“We have not even been asked”

“If you can’t be bothered to teach that element of it, it can’t be that important.”

**Condition 1**

# Communication

## Mis-communication

(Too much, Non-targeted, Mass)

“you have seen so much irrelevant stuff that you don't have time for, [.....] it is unclear if that is a feed or if it stuff that has already happened”

“sometimes the amount of notifications put me off as well, coz you go on there and you have like 25 things to look through and its like oh for gods sake!”

“yeah I think *[tutor name removed]* is the worst because he puts everything twice”

## Lack of communication

“I wasn't actually entirely aware of them”

“I didn't realise there were stuff we could have used to help us with actually learning”

“Not everybody knows about it. So I haven't done it because I don't know what it is”

“I am not aware of the e-tivities, I don't even know... I don't even know that there were e-learning sort of facility that you can have at some sort of access to some materials.”

**Condition 2**

# Design: VLE & e-tivities

## Appearance

“The visual design doesn't really have an impact on me because I know I've got to do it.”

“...it is just so unappealing...”

“it is just so dated.”

“like they dug it up out of Time Team”

## Functionality

“...you try five six key strokes before you actually find what you have been looking for”

“ .. the only thing that we really praised about the NILE site was the file hosting”

## Timing

“I can't really remember cause at the time it happened I was working on one of our main projects and it didn't seem as an important and I kinda left it for a bit and then forgot about it.”

## Interactivity

“ make it more interactive - So like it actually has things that people want and need to go on for, not just having to need”

“Buttons...Didn't get anything from it... Didn't learn anything”

## Purpose

“I think e-learning will be ok to back up a classroom activity... as a refresher.”

**Condition 3**



# Digital Literacy/ Technology

## Attitudes

“I hate technology, I don’t get on with it very well”

“Well I found it easier this year than the other years accessing it.

2 students simultaneously: “It always goes wrong!” (laughter)

## Lack of support

“It took two weeks for me to get a password”

“one of them I couldn’t understand how you were supposed to put the information on it”

## Outdated tech literacies

“No all about IE! Old school! I am like an old lady with computers...!”

“being wobbly with the technology...”

“If people aren’t very techy its going to be awful”

## Compatibility Issues

“One of my friends has difficulty with compatibility with Macs and stuff like that. They have struggled getting on to NILE and getting sound and stuff”

“I like I put it on my google chrome and I had to delete it and re-download it and I was so fed up. I then just used it on IE because it didn’t affect my google chrome. It meant I had to keep finding it! “

# Self-management

## Dealing with stress

“I got so stressed out with that whole exhibition thing, even going onto the google account like it was just so confusing, I couldn't access everything and I would have to come here to get stuff.”

“It makes me feel stressed out, this puts me off that plus the fact it is on a computer and that scares me!”

## Selectivity

“I know it is important to have some recap but it is kinda out of the way, it is just easy not to do it.”

“It's not compulsory is it. So it is easier not to...”

# Learning preferences and beliefs

## Independence as negative

“there is no expertise necessarily, you feel like you are teaching yourself a lot of the time”

“You are just doing your own research you are not being taught anything you are just reading something which I can do without being on a course”

## Learning beliefs

“Face to face is easier. Can't beat it.”

“I find it really very difficult to learn anything from the screen.”

“in a classroom you can incorporate all the learning styles in one room so you can sort of target everyone really but online you can't”

## Perceived value

“It came across like e-tivities just don't seem important.”

“It is not a proper learning environment...”

“Even if it not compulsory I am probably going to do it, because there is a good reason someone has set it up.”

“It doesn't really feel as a compulsory part of our course”

“for some it might be more relevant so whereas for [subject redacted] I don't think it is.”



# Conclusion

- Transparent pedagogy
- Develop digital literacies
- Model good practice, openness & flexibility
- Students pick up and reflect staff attitudes