Recruiting foundation and bridging learners in a digital age.

Is online information on tertiary education accessible for bridging learners?

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• Purpose of research
• Literature review
• Participants
• Vignette
• Findings
• Student comments
• Discussion
Purpose of research

Bridging education

• Agenda of widening access and participation in higher education
• Applications have reduced
• Increasingly younger students
• Familiarity in use of technology
• Enrolments entirely online
• Low literacy levels and often previously unsuccessful learners
Stats NZ (2013)

- 1 in 5 NZ homes not connected to internet.
- Largest group accessing internet are currently employed and have tertiary qualifications.

Published research

- Limited studies which tended to be on website design and were marketing related (Astani and Eldhini, 2008; Hasan 2013).
- Studies were on undergraduate students not bridging learners.
Participants

• Newly enrolled Bridgepoint, Unitec students
• AT steps 2- 4 literacy
• 53 students
• Most aged 18- 25
• Health pathway
Survey

• During class time
• Computer or I-pad
• Given an NZ tertiary ITP
• Asked to find bridging or foundation courses for that ITP
• Complete a survey about the website
• Mean of 11 students evaluating each website and each student completed a mean of 3 evaluations
• 11 AT step 2-3 students using i-pads
• Struggle to get past front pages and gave up
• Then more gave up after only a few clicks
• Older students more engaged but frustrated
• Google search used
• Only 1 enjoyed task and most were frustrated
Websites

• 71% of students had used a website to find information on the course they were currently enrolled in
• 57% rated websites as very important for finding information
• The rest rated websites as reasonably important
- 9 different terms used for bridging/ foundation education!
- Only 1 ITP had direct access off the front page (Wintec)
Relationship between overall rating and aspects of website

Scale 1 - 5

Overall Rating

Ease of finding information
Visual appeal
Technical performance
User-friendly
Successful attempts
Other observations

• At least 9 different terms for bridging programmes
• Finding the cost and start dates was reasonably easy for most websites
• Particularly difficult to find a name of contact person, not personalised
• Location of courses on websites, sometimes grouped, sometimes spread
• Sometimes difficult for researchers to find information
Students observations

- Would not bother using this web site
- Not very clear don’t know where to go
- Wish they could make it easier
- No information about a pre-degree course or anything suggesting foundation education
- There is a named person to contact. This is very good
- Easy to find with info all on one page
- Clicking around it just made me frustrated
- Too much info not able to find what I’m looking for
- I’m not sure if vocational studies is equivalent to foundation studies
Conclusions

• Bridging course information difficult to find on many ITP’s websites
• Not having a generic name for bridging education maybe confusing
• Easy to find a contact phone or email but difficult to find a contact person or photo
• Students recognise the importance of website information but find ITP websites frustrating and difficult to access
• Students appear to value a website’s ease of use and technical performance rather than visual appeal
• Small study more research is needed
• Findings didn’t differ from studies carried out with degree level students/all rated ease of finding relevant information highly


Statistics New Zealand (2013) New Zealand Household Use of Information and Communication Technology 2013