



# **Using edtech to create edgeless learning across higher education**






*Paul Westmore, IT Director at the University of Plymouth, UK, explains how a single sign-on digital learning environment has helped the institution to create an edgeless learning experience for its 20,000+ students.*


Plymouth's ambitious digital strategy supports our goal of becoming an edgeless university as well as recognising our high quality, internationally-leading, education and research into innovation. Our vision looks to enable students and staff to experience the university entirely digitally if they choose to. In order to achieve this vision, we decided that we had to replace our existing module-focused virtual learning environment (VLE) with something more dynamic and flexible: something that was mobile-first and housed a range of resources and systems which would all sit behind a single sign-on.

Our aim was for the new digital learning environment (DLE) to become an online hub where students and staff could access all content such as lectures and course materials, submit work, receive results, and interact with each other all through one online system. We didn't just want to install a SharePoint-based system, we wanted to ensure a completely different experience for students, where they could go into an online environment, and access everything they need. DLE's are gaining moment across the education sector and for us, it would form the building block of our digital vision for the university. We also wanted the DLE to be available through multiple platforms, including personal devices such as mobile phones and tablets.

Integrated tools can be added to the VLE, such as plug-ins like plagiarism detector Turnitin, open open-source instruments like e-portfolios. Open learning environments were also introduced along with VLEs but with a focus for universities to create their own



 environment and therefore have more control over it. Much like our DLE, we have built the system to offer a platform for our students to engage with all forms of content in one place, at one time. This is an improvement compared to our previous solution, which saw several systems built in-house. Standardising this as one system has helped us to be more aligned with our digital strategy and another step closer to becoming an edgeless university.




 We have a large student body with ever-changing wants and needs. The University of Plymouth is home to more than 20,000 students and almost 3,000 staff. A further 17,000 students are studying for a Plymouth degree at partner institutions in the UK and around the world, making Plymouth the UK's 15<sup>th</sup> largest university. As such, we wanted to create a learning environment that was the sum of all the components that go into Plymouth's student experience. I've found that when people refer to a VLE, they just mean Moodle, the core environment where all of the learning materials, are held. Therefore, we wanted something with a wider range of learning environment tools.



We made the decision to ask [CoSector – University of London](https://www.publishing.ninja/V2/php/linkTracking.php?magazineID=374&pageID=8997&link=https://london.ac.uk/cosector) (<https://www.publishing.ninja/V2/php/linkTracking.php?magazineID=374&pageID=8997&link=https://london.ac.uk/cosector>) to implement and support the hosting of Moodle, a traditional VLE based platform. However, one of the constraints of Moodle is that ordinarily documents cannot be shared with different programmes. So CoSector – University of London set up a bespoke solution where the documents are held in a different system, creating one learning asset which is shared between multiple programmes.


During a year-long project, we rolled out the DLE across multiple sites, over the summer period, which included developing an advanced assignment tool, mobile app integration and the subject view courses. Today, Plymouth's DLE brings together a number of systems integrated through Moodle, using it as the hub. The new functions included timetable information, coursework submission, e-assessments, quizzes and 'minimum module information' consisting of details of each module, electronic reading lists, past exam



rs, forums and wikis – all to help students make more informed decisions about their learning journeys.

 Our new DLE at the university now brings together a number of systems integrated through Moodle as the hub. Single sign-on technology provides easy integration and movement between systems such as Talis Aspire (reading lists), PebblePad (ePortfolio), Panopto (content/lecture capture), and Turnitin, in addition to a range of excellent tools including formative and summative testing, submission and feedback. A subscription to  LinkedIn Learning provides a wealth of online video-based courses for staff and students to enhance their courses or develop their own skills. It's clear that the new solution was  more superior to the old system, which had multiple platforms and no central hub, now staff and students can access information from one place.

 The uptake and use of the system has been unprecedented. Around 13,500 students access the DLE on a daily basis and 90% of the Mobile with Plymouth App usage is now  related to teaching and learning activities.

 Usage of the DLE continues to grow year on year and in 2018 serviced 6,000 module sites, hosted 1,200 formative quizzes, contained nearly 30,000 embedded learning resources and supported over 8,000 eSubmissions. Students accessed over 25,000 hours of captured lecture content, viewed over 170,000 LinkedIn Learning videos and generated over 350,000 originality reports via Turnitin.

Following the integration of the new system, we received a very positive response on the National Student Survey (NSS). Some of the student feedback included; **“The DLE is a fantastic and easy to use resource...”** and **“Resources available in the library and DLE are great, with a good range of books, articles, online seminars, etc.”**

The centrality of having a single-integrated user experience has been really crucial to the success of the project. The University of Plymouth's DLE has now become a portal into the teaching and learning community of the University.

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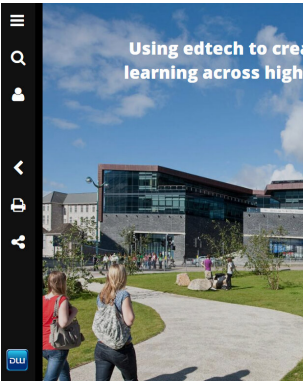
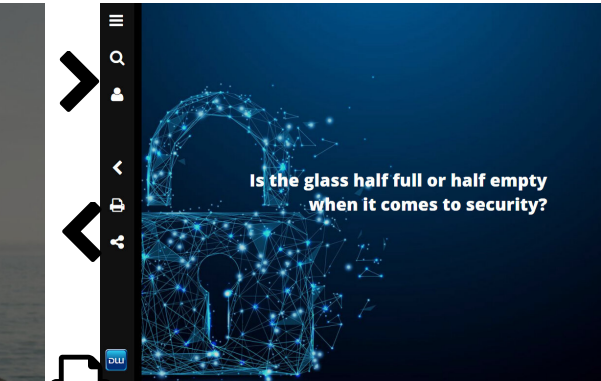
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