Roehampton's digital learning journey

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Xavier Briche, Head of Digital Learning at the University of Roehampton, discusses how the Digital Learning department has enhanced the student learning experience.

Here at Roehampton, we have created a robust Digital Learning Services department (DL) to support technology for teaching and learning.

The department strives for innovation within the University and focuses on new and existing technologies to support the learner's journey and to provide digital tools to the teaching community. We have separated the two departments to allow a greater focus on cutting-edge educational technologies to support the outstanding student digital experience.

A solution for diversity

In 2015, the University decided it was time to enhance the virtual learning environment (VLE) as a key enabler for improving accessibility. The existing solution wasn't fit for this purpose as it was too static. We needed a versatile solution, one that would easily allow regular upgrades and product functionalities to help improve the user experience for less able students as they enter HE.

We've been implementing an SMS plug-in as an add-on to our online assessment workflow. The plug-in automatically sends a text message to students when their assessment feedback is on the VLE, to engage our students in their learning and close the feedback loop more effectively.

Complying with GDPR

The new GDPR regulations and EU directive on online accessibility needed some close attention, therefore discussions between both teams about GDPR, and the steps needed to ensure the online learning practices, processes and system compliance were addressed.

Clear results for students

Universities are underpinned by their scores in the National Student Survey (NSS) and the Teaching Excellence Framework. Our DL follows these performance results closely, to see how outsourced services are performing and whether they are adding value to the student experience.

The Moodle platform and the service, provided by CoSector – University of London, has increased student satisfaction by around 6%. Students now feel the VLE is reliable and robust, and can be accessed 24/7 from any location.

We are pleased with the Moodle platform and the benefits of supporting the VLE as well as the teaching and learning ecosystems. Blended and online learning are priorities to engage and support our extremely diverse student population. Students and staff often rely on assistive technology integrations in the VLE, its therefore vital to ensure the VLE is an inclusive and accessible digital environment.

Online learning and VLEs are hugely beneficial for students with disabilities as e-resources and teaching material such as course slides are systematically uploaded to the VLE. Most VLEs now provide a way of navigating around an online course with ease, accessing web links and additional files by using keystrokes only.

Changing a VLE host can be a big risk because the system is embedded in all aspects of the delivery of teaching and learning. In terms of account management and value added for our students and teaching staff, it has proven to be well worth the switch.

See roehampton (https://www.roehampton.ac.uk).ac.uk (https://www.roehampton.ac.uk) for more details on how the university uses digital learning to enhance the student experience.

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