CoSECTOR | UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY

CoSector – University of London supports online learning strategy at Oxford Brookes University

Overview

Based in the South East of England, Oxford Brookes is one of the UK's leading modern universities. With 150 years of history, it enjoys an international reputation for teaching excellence and innovation as well as strong links with business and industry sectors.

In order for the university to maintain its status as a contemporary learning institution, it is essential that it provides both staff and students with sleek, easy to use, digital educational services, such as virtual learning environments (VLEs).

For the past five years the university has been undergoing its SESE strategy for transforming the student experience, which aims to complete by 2020. Part of this strategy is the use of technology to enhance both the transactional elements of staff and student experiences and transformational learning which underpins a commitment to becoming the sector leader in online learning by this date. In order to achieve this, it is vital that the university offers an attractive, digital learning experience that meets the expectations of both staff and students.

Across the university there are currently five IT departments, with 114 staff members, so it is vital that all services integrate easily and run seamlessly.

Oxford Brookes as an institution is never static and constantly evolves its digital services to provide the best learners journey for its students. Bearing this in mind, all outsourced hosted services procured need to be agile, with a strong level of customer support to aid with adaptions to the service when new developments need to be made.

Therefore, it is important that they have a strong relationship with the vendors of the outsourced services they manage, and that there is a degree of trust on both sides if any changes need to be made.

Challenge

Six years ago, as part of its SESE strategy, the university decided it was time to implement a new virtual learning environment (VLE) as it was having issues with its previous online learning system.

The drive for this change was feedback from the students and staff that the platform wasn't flexible enough and they found it was too rigid. The IT staff also felt that, from a technical viewpoint, its flat hierarchy didn't allow them to create categories that could represent programmes. It was very much modular course based.

In order to align with the new strategy, the university wanted a much more versatile approach. It strives for quality over cost when selecting new digital services, specifically favouring ones that are future proof and easily adapts to its changing needs. As a result, the Oxford Brookes information services team did some peer analysis and requirements gathering, to evaluate the services that other institutions were using. Once this process had been completed, it was perceptively obvious that Moodle was the right solution as the world's most widely used VLE.

It was then a case of selecting a vendor partner for the implementation and hosting of the Moodle platform, and after a successful tender process, CoSector –

University of London was chosen as the service partner due to its knowledge of the sector as an academic institution itself.

CoSector – University of London then successfully migrated the new Moodle platform onto the Oxford Brookes system, replacing the previous service. As this was a large system to replace, with multiple integrations, the process took around nine months.

On-going service

Oxford Brookes currently works with the CoSector – University of London 'Bloom' team, which includes the hosting and technical support of the Moodle VLE platform with Mahara integration.

The original tender for the implementation of the VLE was initially very technical, and no further support was required from CoSector - University of London as part of this arrangement, apart from hosting. However, since the partnership began in 2012 the relationship between the two organisations has evolved, and with the help of CoSector – University of London the university has since expanded its use of Moodle into other areas outside of online learning, including the integration of student management records and mobile apps. The university also reports that it has the South East's most used national health service applicant processing platform built into it.

As a result, the Moodle platform has changed from a standard VLE, into one of the university's most used key services, and it has become embedded into several departments.

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>
> **Greg Crichton**   Head of Information Services at Oxford Brookes

CoSector – University of London provides on-going technical support and advice for this, and both organisations have since embraced a service credit model which gives a better understanding of how much capacity each side has and allows easier communication. This gives a level of independence to the university, for example, if a product needs changes within the Moodle platform, the university can quickly inform the Bloom team, without the need to wait for approval. This is based on an element of trust, and greatly speeds up the process allowing a better workflow between the two organisations.

Benefits and results

The university has also seen an improved approval rate of its digital services with its stakeholders, with a recent barometer and survey scoring Oxford Brookes at just below 90% for online learning satisfaction.

After a six-year relationship, the university continues to be impressed with the exemplary on-going service delivery from CoSector – University of London. Greg Crichton, head of information services at Oxford Brookes, says: "CoSector are very much embedded within our institution and have been very reliable over the years."

The use of CoSector – University of London has also highlighted the benefits of external hosting to the organisation.

Greg comments: "When I analyse the data of the CoSector service against other internal services, I can now evidence to others that outsourced hosting is far more reliable than when we do it internally.

Moodle would not be one of our key services today if we'd tried to host the platform ourselves and it probably wouldn't be as good if we had done it with another vendor. Our partnership with CoSector is one of the things that has made the platform the success it is. I certainly don't think we would have stayed with the platform in the early stages, if we hadn't had that really solid partnership and great communication with CoSector."

Dave Kenworthy, Director of Digital Services at CoSector – University of London also commented on the partnership: "We have enjoyed our journey with Oxford Brookes over the past five years, and we feel that both of our businesses have evolved, and with this, so has our understanding of each other's needs and requirements. This enables us to provide the strongest and most agile service we can, in order to greatly enhance the learners journey for all Oxford Brookes students and to improve teaching services for educational providers."

Conclusion

The university is in the midst of planning a seven-year digital transformation strategy, and the CoSector – University of London relationship will be valuable in ensuring that this process runs smoothly. Not just to provide support with any changes that need to be made to the service, but also to act as a focus point against new services.

Greg concludes: "With the strategy we need to not just

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Dave Kenworthy Director of Digital Services at CoSector – University of London

talk about digital first, we actually need to do it, properly and seamlessly. We now use CoSector as measurement for all other service delivery, as we know we're happy with its service baseline, and we can look at other vendors to compare.

The platform CoSector is providing and the way they provide it, really works for us, because they're updating it all the time, and optimising it. That agility is really helping us push our online learning strategy forwards. I would definitely consider working with CoSector for other projects in the future. We are looking at expanding our capabilities in learning analytics and I believe that they could help in this area."

For further information on the range of services we offer, please visit our website or contact us at:

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