



A seamless digital learning environment at Plymouth University

This exemplar is relevant to Digital Student challenges:

Deliver a robust, flexible digital environment

Take a strategic, whole-institution approach to the digital student experience

Plymouth University have replaced a module-focused VLE with a dynamic Digital Learning Environment (DLE) that allows content to be created, managed and used – by students or staff – more flexibly across programmes of study. The design, functionality and feature set of the DLE was informed by surveying students (n=3,500) and by student and staff focus groups (n=400) to discover technology needs, uses, and future aspirations. The project began in January 2014, using an agile approach whereby features of the new environment were released as they were developed, allowing the project team to respond to feedback. Students and staff took part in fortnightly Show and Tell sessions in which their ideas were gathered and fed back into the development process.

The DLE now provides integrated access to teaching and learning resources, ePortfolios, reading lists and video support at Lynda.com. As part of the project an Open Learning platform will also be established to allow activities and resources to be opened up to external participants, whether this is to offer 'taster' sessions to prospective students, to meet the needs of work-based and distance learners, or to bring outside experts into classes. External assessors and other stakeholders such as employers will gain a much richer picture of the learning that takes place at the University.

The new environment allows students to use their own preferred devices and services, and to access university services seamlessly from a single point of entry. Support is focused on the digital skills and needs of individuals rather than on the use of specific systems. A team of DLE Advocates has been established across the University to provide training, advice and encouragement. The Advocates ensured that all content was migrated into the DLE for September 2014, and have helped teaching staff respond to the new minimum module standard – introduced in response to students' overwhelming request for consistent use across modules.

Up to 10,500 students now access the DLE on a daily basis and 90% of the 'Mobile with Plymouth' app usage (16,700 active user in the 2014/15 academic year) is related to teaching and learning. Student feedback has been very positive. They love the integrated sign-on, especially the way module alerts in Moodle can now appear on their mobile phone. Simple features such as being able to book slots with lecturers and personal tutors online are popular. At Teaching and Learning Committee, students report improvement in the availability of lecture materials and consistency of online information. There has been a marked increase in the use of learning technology including webinar delivery, formative testing, online submission, the use of electronic reading lists and eBooks.

How does this meet the challenge?

- Development has been based on national evidence and best practice, though informed by local feedback.
- Students have been involved in multiple ways, from the initial surveys and focus groups, to piloting features, to advocating new uses of the digital environment in their departments.
- Single sign-on and integrated systems are very popular as they save students time and effort.
- Students overwhelmingly support a consistent approach to course information and online materials.

Find out more

- [About the project](#)
- [DLE Project Blog](#)
- [Resources](#)
- [Mobile with Plymouth University](#)

Contact: Neil Witt <N.Witt@plymouth.ac.uk>