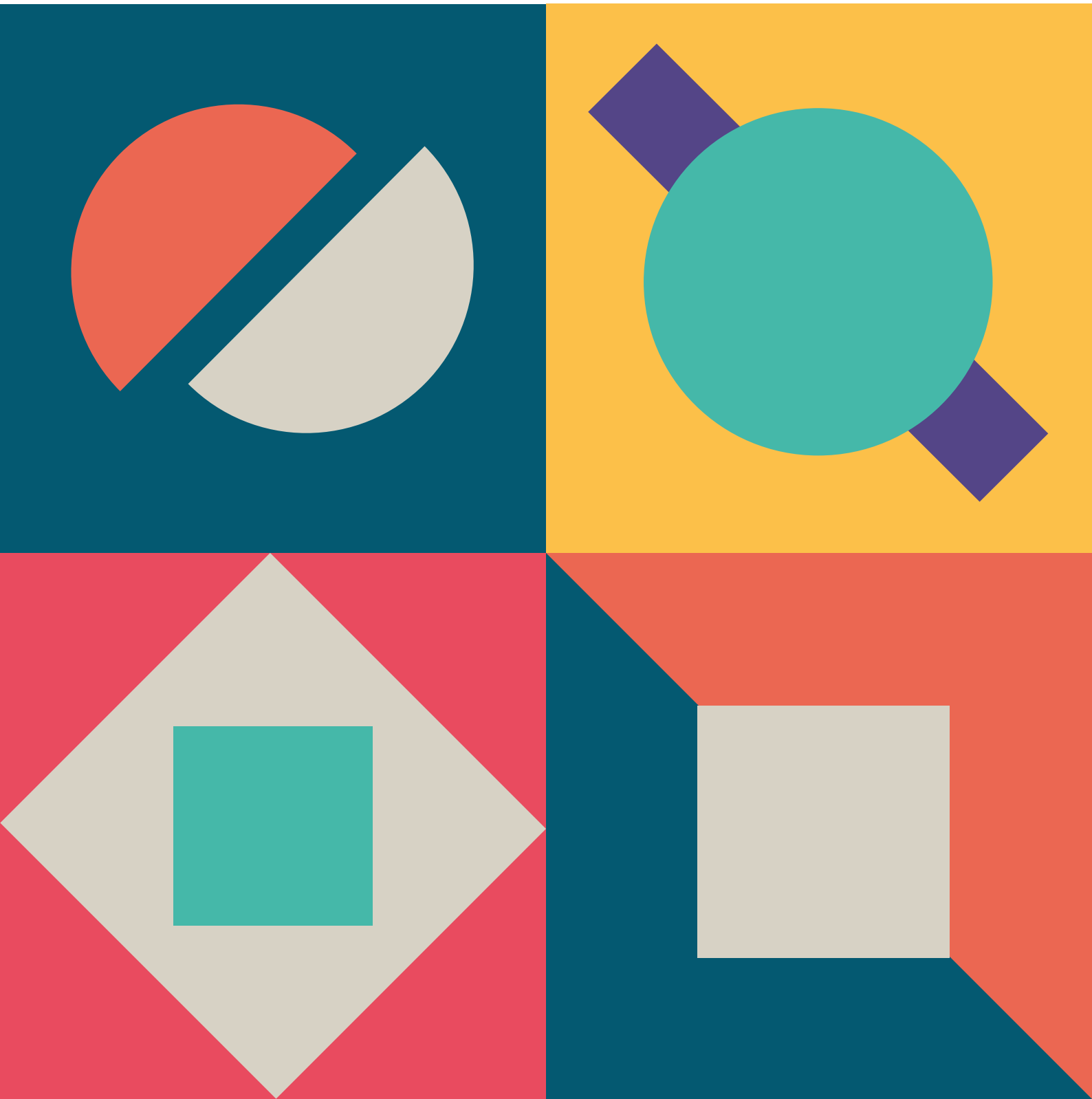


Felxible ecosystems

Case studies



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Digital Badges for Digital Skills

Cardiff Metropolitan University

Gareth Johns

Institutional Context

Medium sized, post-92 university in south Wales.

Audience(s)

The Digital Skills team offer digital badge credentials to staff and students (not externals) who complete certain digital skills courses at Cardiff Met.

Some of the courses we offer to students and staff lead to traditional qualifications, eg Microsoft Office Specialist. Digital badges for those certifications are issued by Microsoft.

The courses we (Cardiff Met) issue badges are for courses where no appropriate qualification exists, eg Collaborating with Microsoft Teams, Online Survey Design and Photoshop Foundation

Intended outcomes of the project

- + provide a mechanism for students and staff to evidence digital skills through platforms employers use (LinkedIn and social media)
- + provide a way to reward completion of digital skills development courses
- + encourage enrolment onto our courses
- + increase the authenticity of our courses.

Outline of activity

Our Microsoft Office Specialist and Microsoft Technology Associate courses place e-learning at the core of the training. This can be completed at the learner's pace. However, to encourage engagement/retention, the courses run in a semi structured way. Optional complementary key concept sessions are available, these explore key concepts through 'live' (Teams)/face-to-face training. In addition the courses include peer-assessed formative assessments throughout that have to be completed by specific deadlines, but there is flexibility as to when the learner completes it.

The courses that offer Cardiff Met digital badges are based around two to three 'live' training sessions (each one to two hours), but these are recorded and learners are permitted to complete one of those sessions by watching an interactive video of that session (Teams recording with embedded Forms quiz).

How this project offers its intended audience flexible learning opportunities

Our Microsoft Office Specialist and Microsoft Technology Associate courses place e-learning at the core of the training. This can be completed at the learner's pace. However, to encourage engagement/retention, the courses run in a semi structured way. Optional complementary key concept sessions are available, these explore key concepts through 'live' (Teams)/face-to-face training. In addition the courses include peer-assessed formative assessments throughout that have to be completed by specific deadlines, but there is flexibility as to when the learner completes it.

The courses that offer Cardiff Met digital badges are based around two to three 'live' training sessions (each one to two hours), but these are recorded and learners are permitted to complete one of those sessions by watching an interactive video of that session (Teams recording with embedded Forms quiz).

How this project contributes to equity, diversity, and inclusion in higher education

The flexible nature of some of courses means those with commitments eg childcare can complete it at their pace. Our courses are fully accessible from a technology point-of-view.

Barriers to implementation

Just the initial cost of the Credly licenses (the platform we use to issue the badges).

Guidance to those implementing similar projects

We chose to use a third party (Credly) to host and issue the digital badges. Mainly this was to enhance the reputation/authenticity of the badges (as major companies use Credly as their digital badge platform), but also it greatly simplifies the badge issuing process. There is a cost associated with using Credly.

Evaluation

The Microsoft courses require an exam be passed in order to gain the digital badge. The Cardiff Met courses require a project-based assessment (one to three hours work) be passed to gain the digital badge.

Course evaluations are sent for each cohort. For the question "To what extent (if at all) did the assessment for the course help you understand and apply the course material?"

#	Answer	%	Count
0	Not at all	0.00%	0
1	A little	2.99%	2
2	A moderate amount	8.96%	6
3	A lot	32.84%	22
4	A great deal	55.22%	37
Total		100%	67

For question “How valuable (if at all) do you find the digital badge as a means of certifying your skills and sharing your achievement?”

#	Answer	%	Count
0	Not at all valuable	0.00%	0
1	Slightly valuable	2.99%	2
2	Moderately valuable	29.85%	20
3	Very valuable	34.33	23
4	Extremely valuable	32.84%	22
Total		100%	67

Certificate of Personal and Professional Development Modular Framework

Ulster University

Ursula McTaggart and Abbie McKenna

Institutional Context

As Northern Ireland's civic university Ulster is grounded in the heart of the community, committed to the social and economic development of the region, and strives to make a lasting contribution to society. Ulster aims to transform lives, stretch minds, and develop the skills required by a growing economy.

Audience(s)

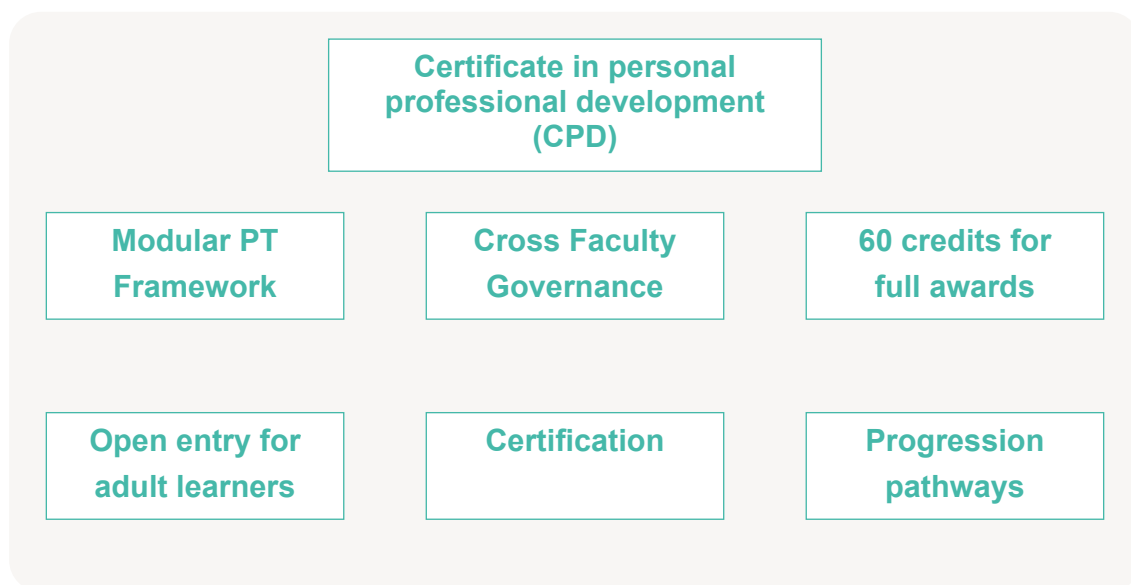
The design and development of the modular provision within the CPPD framework is informed by learning needs identified through on-going consultation with the education, community, and business sectors.

CPPD modular options are available at level 3 and or 4 for the following reason and purpose:

- 1 Part time students intent on exploring the achievement of higher-level skills and or a route for transition to further higher education study (in line with the Northern Ireland Regional Strategy Access to Success)
- 2 Curriculum enrichment for full time students to give credit for achievement of employability skills and understanding
- 3 Workforce development for employers, to enable recognition and accreditation of skills (in line with the Northern Ireland Regional Strategy Skills for Success).

Intended outcomes of the project

- + provide a mechanism for students and staff to evidence digital skills through platforms employers use (LinkedIn and social media)
- + provide a way to reward completion of digital skills development courses
- + encourage enrolment onto our courses
- + increase the authenticity of our courses.



Outline of activity

Over the last five to ten years many UK higher education institutions have established frameworks of credit accumulation to support non-traditional learners in ‘dipping their toe’ into higher education either through community curriculum, work-based learning or tasters of academic disciplines. Ulster University’s Centre for Flexible and Continuing Education established a level 4 framework to support this approach in 2008/2009. Establishing an institutional framework which crosses traditional academic disciplinary boundaries enables learners to identify and choose their own learning pathway, not only increasing their confidence as they successfully complete courses, but also validating their professional and personal knowledge to such an extent that they feel equipped to progress to further or more traditional study.

As part of the development of the University’s product offering of courses the framework provides opportunity for Faculty to meet a curriculum need in a short course or explore and test markets to help inform course design and development prior to completing full validation.

Since 2009 approximately 7,500 adult learners have enrolled on 150 CPPD modules from all subject areas at Ulster University. Evidence from the community development pathway within the Faculty of Social Sciences demonstrates the potential to exploit progression pathways and increase the engagement of part time adult learners through a trajectory of access and undergraduate degree. Since 2015, 124 students (predominantly adults returning to education; learners with no formal academic qualifications; and people on low income/entitled to social welfare benefits, living in socio-economically disadvantaged communities (as measured by Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency deprivation indices)) have transferred from CPPD modules to the BSc Community Development Programme.

Approximately 20,000 undergraduate students have undertaken employability modules attached to this framework as an extra curriculum option alongside a main degree programme of study since 2009.

How this project offers its intended audience flexible learning opportunities

The Ulster flexible framework approach enables students to undertake modular study from as small as five credits in an academic year with no time limit on the accumulation of 60 credits for an award of Certificate of Personal and Professional Development. Each successfully completed module is evidenced through the provision of a modular certificate substantiating the learning journey and providing vital confidence to facilitate progression to more traditional higher education study. Whilst the majority of students usually complete one or two modules, over 200 students have graduated with a Certificate of Personal and Professional Development since 08-09.

How this project contributes to equity, diversity, and inclusion in higher education

We work with community organisations to encourage and support access and application to higher education opportunities at Ulster University and in conjunction with local area-based college partners.

Many adults begin learning through education networks, classes, workshops and opportunities offered through their local communities.

Supporting and encouraging informed decision making, to enable adults to access transformative learning, whether through community or work is an important aspect of flexible education at Ulster University. The ability of the university to support fee waivers for adult learners and widening access cohorts is essential to the sustainability of underrepresented groups accessing higher education. Each year Ulster University through the Widening Access Agreement make £85k available to financially help and support adult learners from a widening access background who meet the Flexible Pathways Funding criteria.

How this project connects to policy or funding initiatives

Ulster utilises this institutional framework approach to support adult returners in line with the Northern Ireland Access to Success strategy which identifies the following groups as underrepresented in higher education:

- + persons in SEC Groups 5 – 7
- + students from low participation/high deprivation neighbourhoods;
- + young Protestant males from areas of high deprivation
- + adult learners, particularly work-based learners.

Barriers to implementation

An institutional framework such as the Certificate in Personal and Professional Development requires buy in and support from all university departments. At Ulster we manage both the administration and academic governance from within a central department (Centre for Flexible Education), however cooperation from other departments such as the Academic Office, Registry, Admissions, Library Services, Digital Services is central to the success of the programme. University systems are also traditionally not set up to support smaller chunks of learning often delivered outside the normal academic calendar. It often requires a manual intervention to work around system limitations.

Guidance to those implementing similar projects

Typically, universities are structured into faculties and schools. The development of a modular framework which spans institutional provision requires support from the senior leadership team to ensure development and delivery is solution focused. It is important to have all relevant professional and academic areas involved at the start of development as this type of provision will require changes to academic regulations, governance, admissions, administrative processes, and quality assurance procedures to enable the flexible and agile approach required for successful delivery. The time required to develop a framework approach is dependent on the institution's appetite for academic innovation and the willingness of academic colleagues to support development of new modular provision. Unlike traditional academic programmes which tend to be subject based and have a course director, a framework will require an 'independent academic navigator', who will become the key point of contact both in terms of academic and administrative processes for this provision.

Evaluation

Data from academic year 08-09 to 19-20 demonstrates:

- + 2.5% of all registered students have graduated with a Certificate of Personal and Professional Development with credit typically accumulated across three years (not always consecutive)
- + 4.5% of all registered students' progress to further qualifications usually foundation degrees or Associate Bachelors with Further Education Partners or Undergraduate Degrees with Ulster University.

Postgraduate Continuing Professional Development Framework

Ulster University

Abbie McKenna and Deborah Sloan

Institutional Context

As Northern Ireland's civic university, Ulster is grounded in the heart of the community, committed to the social and economic development of the region, and strives to make a lasting contribution to society. Ulster aims to transform lives, stretch minds, and develop the skills required by a growing economy.

Audience(s)

In a similar fashion to Ulster's undergraduate framework the postgraduate framework provides:

- 1 Part-time students the opportunity to 'taste' postgraduate study at a modular level without committing to a full qualification
- 2 Part-time students the opportunity to complete professional learning relevant to their current role
- 3 Academic staff the ability to develop small packages of learning (as little as five credits), and 'test' interest in the area before committing to the development of a full qualification.

Workforce development for employers, to enable recognition and accreditation of skills (in line with the Northern Ireland Regional Strategy Skills for Success).

Intended outcomes of the project

The rationale for and purpose of the Postgraduate CPD Framework is to:

- + widen access to postgraduate level study by providing flexible learning opportunities for the professional postgraduate CPD market
- + enable participants to choose modules which meet their specific skills requirement for career progression and enhancement of professional practice
- + provide opportunity for participants to build their own postgraduate qualification, tailored to their professional needs
- + allow credit accumulation across a five year period to provide participants the ability to base their level of progression around affordability and other time commitments
- + to increase awareness of and maximise recruitment to existing postgraduate provision.

Outline of activity

The postgraduate CPD framework was piloted in 2012-13 to meet the needs of individuals seeking professional development opportunities through postgraduate study who did not wish to commit to a Masters programme, or already had a postgraduate qualification but needed to upskill in a relevant professional area. The development of the framework enabled Ulster to respond to the needs of this audience in a way that not only met their initial needs but also allowed them to accumulate credit over a five year period to achieve a qualification (Postgraduate Certificate of Professional Development). The framework became part of mainstream provision in 2014-15 and continues to provide an agile and flexible solution to meet the skills needs of Northern Ireland. Between 2012-13 and 2019-20 over 1000 students have successfully completed modules on the postgraduate framework.

How this project offers its intended audience flexible learning opportunities

The Ulster postgraduate CPD framework approach enables students to undertake modular study from as small as five credits in an academic year with up to a five-year limit on the accumulation of 60 credits for an award of Postgraduate Certificate of Professional Development. Each successfully completed module is evidenced through the provision of a modular certificate substantiating the learning journey. Whilst most students usually complete one or two modules, 72 students have graduated with a Postgraduate Certificate of Professional Development since its inception in academic year 2012-13.

How this project connects to policy or funding initiatives

In response to the economic impact of Covid, the Department for the Economy (higher education funder in Northern Ireland) sought proposals from higher education providers for postgraduate opportunities for upskilling and reskilling in priority sectors. All initiatives had to be accredited, delivered fully online and within a six-month period. The flexible and agile nature of the Postgraduate CPD framework enabled Ulster to provide a range of postgraduate modules which met this criterion and supported over 150 learners who had been made redundant or were on furlough because of Covid. This framework will support the objectives of the Department of the Economy's recently published Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland – Skills for a 10X Economy:

+ addressing skills imbalances, driving economic growth

“At the highest levels of post-graduate education, we want to develop stronger relationships between government, business and our world class research institutions. This is not only intended to address the undersupply of qualifications aligned to the development of our priority clusters and the emerging technologies which will underpin them, but also to drive Northern Ireland's potential as a global hub of innovation and knowledge.”

+ creating a culture of lifelong learning

“It must be acknowledged, that the vast majority of the 2030 workforce has already completed compulsory education. Making a difference in the skills of our working age population will not be achieved unless real opportunities are afforded to individuals to upskill/reskill throughout their working lives.”

Barriers to implementation

Ulster first launched a flexible framework at level 4 in 2008-09, due to this experience there were significantly less challenges in developing and launching the level 7 framework. The challenges that did exist related to the university systems and processes which tend to suit traditional programme of learning with a clear start and finish date. It often required a manual intervention to work around system limitations in the first few years until processes became established and embedded within standard university systems.

Guidance to those implementing similar projects

Typically, universities are structured into faculties and schools. The development of a modular framework which spans institutional provision requires support from the senior leadership team to ensure development and delivery is solution focused. It is important to have all relevant professional and academic areas involved at the start of development as this type of provision will require changes to academic regulations, governance, admissions, administrative processes, and quality assurance procedures to enable the flexible and agile approach required for successful delivery. The time required to develop a framework approach is dependent on the institution's appetite for academic innovation and the willingness of academic colleagues to support development of new modular provision. Unlike traditional academic programmes which tend to be subject based and have a course director, a framework will require an 'independent academic navigator', who will become the key point of contact both in terms of academic and administrative processes for this provision.

Evaluation

Between academic year 2012-13 and 2019-20 over 1000 students enrolled on the Postgraduate CPD framework, on average completing one or two postgraduate modules.

- + 7% graduated with a Postgraduate Certificate of Professional Development
- + 3% progressed to further subject based postgraduate study.

The framework has allowed Ulster to:

- + respond quickly to gaps in the market eg development and delivery of a postgraduate module in employment law
- + trial new markets eg development of a five credit point short course in mobile app development – Mobile Academy.
- + encourage collaborative cross Faculty partnerships eg a module in Geographic Information Systems for Teachers
- + meeting higher level skills agenda as evidenced by the response to the covid short-term skills initiative.

LEAP (Learning Excellence Achievement Pathway)

University of Bolton

Dawn Grundy (Academic Librarian for Faculty of Health and Wellbeing) and Graeme Prescott (eLearning Developer)

Institutional Context

The university's mission is to be a distinctive teaching intensive and research informed university known for the quality of our staff, our facilities and our links to employment sectors. Among the key priorities of the university is the focus on the student experience and student satisfaction. The university currently supports a total of 6,335 students of which 5,590 are undergraduates (based on 2019-20 HESA returns).

Audience(s)

LEAP Online is primarily aimed at supporting undergraduates and those returning to study after a period of absence. LEAP Online is a collaborative project between the LEAP Online Team (Dawn Grundy and Graeme Prescott), Student Experience, professional support services staff (such as Library and Careers service) and academic colleagues across the University. The LEAP Online Team also welcome student contributions to section development.

Intended outcomes of the project

- + to harmonise study skills support across the university under one banner
- + to provide a holistic approach to skills acquisition through four key areas: academic development, personal development, digital literacy and student engagement
- + to provide a flexible learning environment with bite sized information
- + to encourage self-directed and extracurricular learning
- + to demonstrate student engagement using digital badging.

Outline of activity

LEAP Online was launched in September 2017 and is based on a new Learning Development Framework (LDF) (Barden, M and McIntosh, E, 2019) written by Library and Student Experience colleagues. The LDF represented a new learning development strategy aiming to ensure that the university's skills offering was comprehensive and coordinated. It demonstrates a holistic approach, recognising four key areas relating to the acquisition of skills, knowledge and experience: academic development, personal development, digital literacy and student engagement. LEAP Online is the online representation of the LDF. The university had an existing academic skills portal, BISSTO. BISSTO was expanded, redeveloped and rebranded to become LEAP Online. The LEAP Online project team originally consisted of four higher education professionals with different, but complementary, expertise. Sitting within different departments across the university and the project we have been leading has had significant impact across the organisation and externally. Our original team comprised one eLearning Technologist, one eResources Librarian, one Academic Librarian and one HE Director of Student Life, responsible for leading a range of strategic interventions spanning teaching, learning and the student experience. Due to staffing changes the LEAP Online team now comprises of one eLearning Technologist and one Academic Librarian. LEAP Online has now become the primary institutional vehicle for the delivery of information and literacy, eLearning and learning development opportunities for students at Bolton. In April 2018, the team won the national LILAC Digital Literacy Award, demonstrating further impact in our external sphere of influence.

How this project offers its intended audience flexible learning opportunities

When developing LEAP Online we were mindful of the diversity of our student body, where many of our learners are mature, part-time and commute into university from the local area. In order to succeed, LEAP Online has to work remotely and serve as a central support resource for our students, particularly when they are not on campus. Integration with other learning infrastructure has ensured that LEAP Online supports flexible study and work/life balance. This is especially important to our students, many of whom juggle their studies alongside other responsibilities (eg part-time work, caring and family roles). LEAP Online is designed with Levels (L1, L2, L3). The levels are colour coded and visually signposted (LEAP level graphic). Levels increase in complexity and depth of learning required. Level of learning and skill acquisition mapped to HE levels (L1 HE4/Foundation, L2 HE5, L3 HE6). A typical LEAP Online page layout consist of an introduction, PowToon (animation) printable handout (of the PowToon animation) activity – for the majority of sections assessment – to measure understanding of the topic links to other related content. The flexibility of the bite sized information was something which we knew would really appeal to our student community. Many of our students have busy lives and need something flexible, which they could use to support and enhance the taught sessions at university. .

How this project contributes to equity, diversity, and inclusion in higher education

LEAP Online was developed using feedback from students and graduate interns. The feedback enabled us to improve the user interface as well as to design and deliver enhancements to the interactive modules. Students were involved in the consultation on LEAP and a University of Bolton graduate intern was hired for six months to create digital content and improve the accessibility of the platform. As discussed in section 8 of this form, LEAP Online supports flexible study and work/life balance. Impact of LEAP Online at student and programme level was shared at University of Bolton TIRI (Teaching Intensive, Research Informed) conference (See ubir.bolton.ac.uk/1818/). LEAP Online is designed using a responsive web framework making the site accessible on mobile devices. Using a mobile first approach has enabled us to meet the needs of students who may be studying whilst on work placement or commuting. We use web accessibility standards to ensure content is accessible to our diverse range of our learners and students with specific needs. Alternative content is provided where appropriate, for example, a transcript of the animated content which forms an introduction to each LEAP Online section. In order to further widen participation, we have licensed LEAP Online under a Creative Commons 'Share Alike' license to enable other institutions to use and adapt our content. LEAP Online is included in the University of Bolton's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2021-26). Alongside face-to-face workshops provided by the University's Life Lounge, a number of LEAP online modules have been developed that address prevention and early intervention including mindfulness, stress management and managing anxiety. It's likely that more of this type of content will be developed in future to support students' achievement and wellbeing.

How this project connects to policy or funding initiatives

1 #UniAsItShouldBe

LEAP Online digital badge data is used as a metric within the University of Bolton [#UniAsItShouldBe](#) bursary scheme which began in September 2019. Open to all undergraduate and foundation level students the award provides £150 per year of study as a cashless bursary.

2 Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR)

Part of the award criteria is that students must earn 15 LEAP Online digital badges in their first year of study, a further 15 in their second year (30 badges in total) and a further 15 in their third year of study (45 in total). Students studying courses with a foundation year can earn a further 15 badges (60 in total). Based on the number of digital badges earned over the duration of their studies, students receive either a Bronze (15 badges), Silver (30 badges), Gold (45 badges) or Platinum (60 + badges) digital badge embedded within their HEAR transcript.

3 Graduate Attributes Matrix for Employability (GAME)

We are planning to work with the University's Careers Service to map LEAP Online sections. GAME webpage: [www.bolton.ac.uk/student-life/careers-and-employability/develop-my-skills/Curriculum Mapping](http://www.bolton.ac.uk/student-life/careers-and-employability/develop-my-skills/Curriculum-Mapping). For the academic year 2021-22 programmes from the Faculty of Health and Wellbeing are mapping LEAP Online modules directly across to curriculum content. LEAP Ahead diagnostics questionnaire. New students undertake a functional skills diagnostic questionnaire with results signposting to LEAP Online sections.

Barriers to implementation

Time! Although we quickly established a LEAP Online Team at the outset of the project, development of the resource as always been considered an ad-on to our regular roles within the university. During the summer of 2017 we worked almost exclusively to create the new LEAP Online website, migrate content over from the old Bolton Interactive Study Skills Tutorial Online website and to write new content. This was made possible by the input of a graduate intern and one of the LEAP Online Team being on temporary secondment to the project at that time. In order to keep the site content up to date and relevant we rely on collaboration with academic and professional services staff across the university which can be challenging.

Guidance to those implementing similar projects

The strength of the project has been the diversity in terms of skills, knowledge and experience of the LEAP Online Team. We feel that this alongside staff and student engagement has been one of the major factors in the success of LEAP Online. We have used our different expertise to consider the aims and objectives of our project from many different angles. This has strengthened our collaborative, non-hierarchical approach and has directly impacted on the quality of the project deliverables. Buy in from academics has equally been essential. Academic advocacy has played a significant role in raising the profile of information literacy across the institution, including within our Off Campus Division. LEAP Online now hosts several 'recommended sections' and is a tool to fulfil the need for information and digital literacy support outside of timetabled library sessions. LEAP Online's flexibility works well within different learning models so was ideal to support university learning and teaching when we needed to quickly pivot to online delivery during the pandemic.

Evaluation

The acquisitions of digital badges for completing section assessments is a useful measure (although not the only measure) of student engagement with LEAP Online. In the first month after launch in September 2017 with 37 badges available, 230 individual students had earned 697 badges. This has now grown to 72 badges and over 6,000 individual students earning over 75,000 badges since site launch (July 2021). Anecdotal feedback from staff has been excellent, with many relaying how positive their students have reacted to using LEAP Online. Increasing numbers of academic staff have requested to collaborate with us on the development of content for new sections. As well as the feedback from staff regarding student engagement, after site launch all badge holders were surveyed on their use of LEAP Online. Over 50 students responded to the survey with overwhelmingly positive feedback. Nearly 90% of respondents had been recommended to use LEAP Online by their academics. 70% of the students had been encouraged to earn the digital badges. 87% enjoy collecting the badges. Most students stated that they complete the activities in each section and almost 80% found them useful. Many students stated that using LEAP Online had improved their academic skills and helped build confidence. Since the initial launch there has been increased desire for LEAP Online content in line with Faculty learning and teaching needs. Examples of these would include the Professionalism section developed for Teacher Training and Nursing and we also work alongside colleagues who may include LEAP Online as part of staff or student awards or internships.

Contact us

General enquiries

+44 (0) 3300 416201

enquiries@advance-he.ac.uk

www.advance-he.ac.uk

Media enquiries

+44 (0) 1904 717500

communications@advance-he.ac.uk

www.advance-he.ac.uk/contact-us

   @AdvanceHE

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