

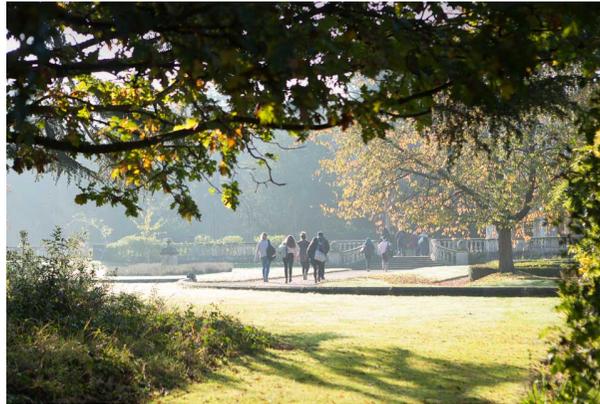
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ENHANCING DIGITAL LEARNING IN HE

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Xavier Briche, Head of Digital Learning at the University of Roehampton, discusses how the Digital Learning department contributes to enhancing the students' learning environments, their digital experience and supporting academic delivery.

Here at The University of Roehampton we pride ourselves on delivering an exemplary student experience by ensuring that the learning environment, both on campus and online, is outstanding and helps to engage our students. In order for us to support this commitment, the University has created a robust Digital Learning Services department (DL) to support technology for teaching and

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Roehampton's Digital Learning department

The department and its service teams strive for innovation within the University and focus on new and existing technologies to support the learner's journey and to provide digital tools to the teaching community. In most academic institutions, this remit would fall under the responsibility of the IT Services but here at Roehampton we have separated the two departments. Allowing a greater focus on bringing in cutting edge educational technologies to support the outstanding student digital experience, online and physical learning environments and employability.

The departments mission is underpinned by Roehampton's ongoing strategic development that includes supporting its diverse student base, improving digital accessibility and championing inclusive practices.

A solution for diversity

Three years ago, the University decided it was time to enhance one of its main online learning tools, the virtual learning

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with the VLE. What we needed was a versatile solution, one that would easily allow regular upgrades and the integration of new products functionalities to help improve the user experience for less able students as they enter Higher Education.

We also needed the VLE to be hosted by a vendor who understood our challenges, to provide comprehensive support with Roehampton-specific developments of the VLE platform. It was very important to us that our technology partner would always be on-hand to give expert advice and support, feed in ideas for new developments to the platform and work closely with our teams and the University to create this.

We decided to work with CoSector – University of London to meet this vision and implement a Moodle platform. Recently we have been working with them on a SMS plug-in as an add-on to our online assessment workflow. The plug-in automatically sends a text message out to students when their assessment feedback is available on the VLE, to engage our students in their learning further and close the all-important feedback loop more effectively.

Complying with GDPR

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between both teams about GDPR, and the steps needed to ensure the online learning practices, processes and systems are compliant.

Clear results for students

The strategy and direction of any UK University is underpinned by scores in their Module Evaluation Survey, the National Student Survey (NSS) and the Teaching Excellence Framework. Our Digital Learning department follows these key performance indicators and 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 clearly been a contributor to improving student satisfaction. Students now feel the VLE is reliable and robust, as it has minimal downtime and the platform can be accessed platform 24/7 from any location. The design itself is easier to use and more accessible and the range of tools that are available is increasing. Since switching for CoSector student satisfaction with the VLE are increased by around 6%.

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Texthelp Read and Write so it is key to ensure the VLE is an inclusive and accessible digital environment. It's important to point out the benefits of online learning and VLEs for students with disabilities, since it can be more difficult for them to access materials and physical resources. However access issues can be more quickly resolved as e-resources and teaching material like course slides are systematically uploaded to the VLE. It also gives more time to all students to prepare and review the course material before and after their lectures. Most virtual learning environments (VLEs) now provide a way of navigating around an online course without a mouse and access web links and additional files by using keystrokes only.

When you change VLE host, you are taking a big risk because the system is embedded in all aspects of the delivery of teaching and learning and is business critical for institutions like Roehampton. In terms of account management and value added for our students and teaching staff it has proven to be worth the switch.

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