Promoting the Equity of the Student Learning Experience

Case Study 8: The Accessibility for Online Learning Project

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What was the issue?

As a University we are committed to ensuring the digital content we produce, and particularly CampusMoodle, is accessible and provides an equitable experience for all students to fully participate in their studies. Key within this are the creation of accessible learning experiences which enable students to engage with all of the opportunities offered by their course, thereby allowing every individual to fulfil their potential as learners and future professionals.

The Accessibility for Online Learning Project has been working since 2020 to implement enhancements to the accessibility of the digital learning experience for everyone. In support of this, the project has provided colleagues with a comprehensive set of guidance to support an engaging and dynamic digital learning experience that are accessible for all.

How was it solved?

Past Work: Developing a Framework for Best Practice

Since its inception, the project has seen successful cross-institutional collaboration delivering a number of significant actions in support of this ambition. The development of a CampusMoodle guidance resource page with templates, tips and AbilityNet webinar recordings was part of the initial work within this space.

The guidance resources are designed to assist staff in the production of accessible content and the revision of existing materials to meet accessible standards. This was supported by the upskilling of staff within schools and key support departments in the production of accessible resources for students, in addition to helping develop an informed understanding of our legal responsibilities with regard to accessibility.

Other early interventions included:

- The development of an [accessibility statement](#), a legal requirement designed to inform users of which aspects of the website and Virtual Learning Environment are, and are not, accessible.
- Short Life Project investigating captioning accuracy and support which resulted in the development of guidance and the captioning statement to ensure staff and students understand what to expect from different resources.
- Students were provided with a [dedicated resource page](#) to enable them to tailor aspects of their learning to meet their requirements, such as browser adjustments, device accessibility and alternative formats. By empowering students with the tools to adapt their learning environment to best meet their needs we support the development of confident learners who are better placed to succeed in their studies.

Present Work: Blackboard Ally

The University invested in Blackboard Ally, an accessibility tool which can automatically create alternative versions of files, enabling students to download the file type best suited to meets their needs. The Instructor Report feature within Ally enables module leads to view a snapshot of their modules accessibility score and step-by-step guidance on how to resolve any issues to improve the overall accessibility of the content.

Three Schools were invited to participate in a Blackboard Ally Pilot between February and May 2022, in advance of the institutional rollout to all new modules in June 2022 for academic session 2022-23. Throughout Semester two, tailored support has been offered to each School, and key support departments have been invited to attend training sessions to further their own understanding of accessibility and Blackboard Ally.

The pilot reemphasised the priorities schools should consider as they move to make content accessible, including:

- New materials that should be created with accessibility in mind.
- Existing materials that are updated or used regularly.
- Content older than August 2020 is considered legacy, but materials in regular circulation should be made accessible.
- Legacy content pre-August 2020 should be archived and not transferred into new module pages.

What comes next?

Future Work: Enhancing Accessible Content Creation

Looking to the future, to further the enhancement of accessible content creation, the following training opportunities are on offer:

- Schools-specific workshops tailored to the digital environments in which their students access their learning.
- General sessions on Blackboard Ally as part of the DELTA CPD programme.
- Accessibility drop-ins sessions for a change to come and ask one-off questions or get individualised support.

These opportunities will continue into semester one 2022-23, and will provide staff with a range of opportunities to access training to support their knowledge development.

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Find out more

This case study is one of nine published as part of the 2021-22 Student-led Project from the Resilient Learning Communities Enhancement Theme.

The project in year 2 explored equity and inclusivity in the context of a more blended learning environment and how we can best develop representative systems and student/class representative skills to effectively support all the students they serve.

You can find further case studies and resources on the Enhancement Themes website.