Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

Title: Using Moodle & Mahara to support project work

Transition(s) the practice supports: Supporting transition within HE <u>and</u> transition to employment within the equine industry.

Abstract: This example of transitions practice demonstrates the use of Moodle (VLE) and Mahara (e-Portfolio) to provide a flexible model and framework which, although developed within the context of an SQA Graded Unit, can be applied across a range of topics and SCQF levels.

SQA's Graded Units are mandatory within Higher National Certificate and Diploma frameworks. Project-based units are designed to provide evidence that students have achieved the principle aims of their qualification, by integrating knowledge, skills and attributes from topics studied throughout the academic year. The complexity of these projects can be challenging, and it is essential that students receive clear guidance and support to help them engage them with the project and fulfil the evidence requirements to the best of their ability.

Description: The HNC Equine Studies Graded Unit project involves the students selecting a horse from the yard in which they are working and preparing it for a suitable event, to take place one month from the start of the assessment. The assessment covers feeding, fitness and training, health and welfare, grooming, clipping, trimming and turnout on the day of the event.

The Moodle/Mahara model – allowing a complete move away from paper-based submissions – was developed during academic year 2014/15. Early discussions between teaching staff and the e-Learning Team explored innovative approaches to engage students in the assessment, and specifically the practical activities required. The team also considered the need for the work specified above (feeding, grooming etc.) to take place in a real-life environment yet provide reliable and robust evidence to fulfil assessment criteria.

Key points from the project to develop the Moodle/Mahara model in the context of the Equine Studies Graded Unit are as follows:

- Reconstructing the planning and developing stages of the assessment with a scaffolding framework approach within Moodle and Mahara.

- Extensive research to identify and explore emerging technologies that the students would engage in. These had to be promoted to the students and functionality within the model created – in order to facilitate, organise and clarify digital evidence, and submit this for assessment.

- Utilising social media tools, such as online forums, for support. Additionally, announcements within Moodle which would also send out email alerts to the students. A browser-based, two-way mobile texting facility within Moodle was also employed to send information/announcements and provide personal and speedy student support.

- Developing digital media resources in order to support the students further, including video guides for the three stages of the assessment i.e. planning, developing and evaluating.

- Using Video Conferencing to provide cross campus support and interaction e.g. staff based at Barony Campus delivering a SmartBoard session with the HNC students based at Oatridge Campus.

- Using peer review by HND Equine Studies students – the 'digipals'. The second year students anonymously peer reviewed the planning stage submissions through Moodle, utilising the online rubrics. It was recognised that this had a positive impact on their own work – comparison between the performance of the 'digipals' in Graded Unit 2 compared to the cohort from the previous academic year (prior to this development project) indicated a significant improvement in performance.

- HNC students very effectively utilised image and video based Apps to highlight their evidence in accordance with the assessment criteria. This was stored within their Mahara (e-Portfolio) pages and had the added benefit of availability to showcase to potential employers.

- During the developing stage of the assessment the students created an e-Journal to record their daily routine. They created image and video evidence to upload to their YouTube accounts and then embed within their e-Journals in Mahara.

- As the students' confidence grew they effectively and efficiently created practical videos with time lapse, explanatory annotations, transitions and voice-overs.

- Reflective and critiquing practices were also carried out on their practical videos using Mahara's online feedback facility.

- This project provided an excellent opportunity for students to develop transferable skills that would aid employment.

Although development focused on use within an SQA Graded Unit there is now a flexible model and framework with the potential of wider use e.g. in work experience units, and other projects where a structured scaffolding framework would be beneficial.

A poster illustrating this work is also available.

Note that SRUC's Equine Graded Unit 1 Project was awarded Highly Commended in the Learning and Teaching category at the College Development Network Annual Awards 2015. This category recognises imaginative and creative ideas to improve the quality and effectiveness to learning, teaching and assessment.

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