

Supporting a step change in the use of a virtual learning environment (VLE) from a student perspective



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“ I cannot stress enough the importance of data for this kind of project... gathering reliable data from students helped to obtain institutional buy-in for the changes. ”

The project

This project involved working with key stakeholders such as the Students' Association, academic schools and the Student Experience Team to ensure student engagement in the process of designing and implementing a new virtual learning environment (VLE) at the University of Aberdeen. We gathered data through focus groups with students and analysed this to identify priority areas for action and to develop practical enhancements with the eLearning Team. The project also involved a promotional campaign to inform all students about planned changes, including posters around campus, an announcement in the student e-zine, sessions handing out flyers on campus, and allowing students to ask questions and/or provide feedback.

Benefits

The major benefit of this project is that it ensured students played an active part in the redesign of their VLE, and, through ongoing evaluation activities, it ensures that students continue to have their voices heard and play an important role in shaping the VLE.

Challenges

Survey fatigue is the main challenge. Our approach centred on focus groups, which proved popular with students because it was a new platform for them to share their suggestions. The students were made aware that we would form a detailed plan based on their input and that this would be sent out to them. This is particularly important, because students often feel like their voices are not heard.

Working with your institutional colleagues

I worked closely with the eLearning Team and others in the Centre for Academic Development. It was good to have the opportunity to work individually (enabling me to identify the detailed aspects of the project) and with others in a team (which stimulated creativity and new ideas and helped me identify limitations) on this project.

What impact has this had on the student experience?

Many of the changes that students had asked for in past surveys and in the focus groups were implemented within a few months after the focus groups. The VLE team delivered a brand-new learning environment which is much more focused on the needs of students, which I believe will have a very positive impact on their experience.

What advice/top tips would you give to others who might try something similar?

It is very useful to cooperate with academic colleagues. While they deal with different issues, the student experience is a common denominator to all and they can provide different channels to communicate with students; they can share their knowledge, and be very helpful with different aspects of the project.