From under the radar to under review

Digital learning in a 'face-to-face university'

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Presentation recording

BIRKBECK: "LONDON'S EVENING UNIVERSITY"

Context

is king.

...established **1823** then as the *London Mechanics Institute*, for the purpose of enabling **working** people to study in the **evening**.

...this was also referred to at the time as 'spreading the seeds of **evil**'.

...the same mission continues.

There is no typical Birkbeck student…

- Overwhelmingly 'evening-taught' - between 6 and 9 pm, studying across all levels and varied disciplines.
- Traditionally: majority part time, enter via direct application, average age mid 30s. But, increasingly: more full time, more UCAS entry, average age getting younger.
- Many 'non-traditional' students (mature, working, first degree).
- Higher than average: EU, those with disabilities and SpLDs, taught postgraduates.

TEL support in a small(-to-medium), 'face-to-face university'

- The TEL team in 2008 was one Learning Technologist, & one IT Trainer.
- Joined by one more LT for 2008/09 to support WebCT to Blackboard migration.
- IT trainer role then not replaced when staff member left, but lecture capture project role created 2014/15.

Much was achieved, considering….

- Migration from WebCT > Blackboard 2008/09.
- Rapid growth from 500 live modules to 1500.
- Migration from Blackboard > Moodle 2011/12.
- Growth of online submission and marking.
- Improvements to data integration.
- Lecture capture.
- Lynda.com.

And even some surprising things...

STEP UP ARTS
to Postgraduate Studies in

Birkbeck for All
Joined-up Thinking on Accessibility

with learning technologies. ✓ Indeed,

Assessment, Feedback & Technology
Contexts and Case Studies in Bloomsbury

Don't ask, don't TEL?

Birkbeck TEL myths…

1. *We're* *not* *the* *Open University*

2. *The academics* *don't* *want to* *do TEL*

3. *Our students are* *not* *'digital natives'*

Getting beyond 'business as usual'?

BIRKBECK MOODLE
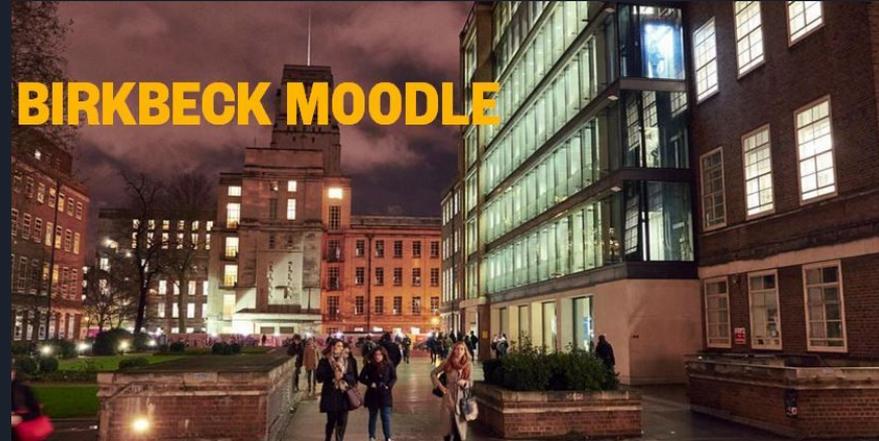
External strand

1. Pull together aggregated data from known surveys (UCISA, HeLF)
2. and reach out to contacts at other HEIs (City, UCL, Sussex)

Internal strand

Interviews with key academic staff

~~Online surveys for (i) staff and (ii) students~~

~~User testing for (i) staff and (ii) students~~

Focus groups

Usage data

External strand

Through looking at HELF and UCISA survey data we confirmed suspicions that ....

1) we already use the standard/most popular platforms, therefore unlikely there is a fundamental technology lack / fix. And

2) availability of TEL support staff is the largest driver of adoption of learning technologies.

External strand

Our questions

1. TEL Vision, Strategy, Policy

2. Governance

3. Development and Innovation

4. Team Structure and Roles

5. The Good the Bad and the Ugly

Findings of external strand

- Across most of the higher education sector, face-to-face teaching is now seen as inherently blended, and this understanding forms part of institutional strategy and key processes.
- Education technology is a fast-moving field where provision and policy need to be routinely reviewed and updated. Institutions often have a governance structure which oversees the links between TEL strategy and implementation.

Findings of external strand

- There is no magic formula - structures have evolved organically and responded to local priorities
- *But*, there is a tendency to separate staff from student support, pedagogic from technical support, and have dedicated support for distance learning.

Findings of internal strand

Learning technologies are used across all departments of the college and the top 20 most visited Moodle modules were spread across 9 departments.

Students appreciate online resources and study materials such as digitised readings, handouts and slides, and video (high production values not required, but rather content that is relevant, timely, and authentic).

Findings of internal strand

Staff felt Birkbeck needs a culture shift around TEL, expressed through an academically-led strategy and governance body that feeds directly into policy and investment decisions.

Most staff would accept some degree of standardisation based on clearly-evidenced guidance, implemented locally by Departments in line with their needs .

Findings of internal strand

Staff noted that a lack of support in making small, modest improvements is a significant brake on considering more significant innovations.

Staff and students across the college regard our typical 'face-to-face' mode learning and teaching as in fact 'blended' (to varying degrees of intensity).

Recommendations

Four main areas:

(a) developing a digital education strategy;

(b) establishing a digital education governance structure;

(c) building a digital education service; and

(d) other key actions arising.

Post-review

Resulting action is not yet clear - institutional wheels turning.

Also, the college has been hit by the sector-wide slump in part time study.

The review has been well received, has done significant work to dispel some of those TEL myths, and indicated a way forward.

In a context of resource scarcity those at the helm will wonder if they can afford to invest - but can they afford not to?