



## **CASCADE PROJECT: CASE STUDY 5**

### **Maximizing effective use of technology in new programmes**

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Aimed at academic staff developing new courses and e-Learning managers and learning technologists seeking to encourage wider uptake of technology by teaching staff, this case study draws on the JISC-funded Cascade project's experience of designing tools, systems and resources to enable academic staff to more effectively incorporate the use of technology in new programmes.

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#### **1. BACKGROUND & CONTEXT**

The Department for Continuing Education<sup>1</sup> is the University of Oxford's largest department and each year enrolls approximately 15,000 part-time students. It employs a core staff of 149 academic and support staff, as well as over 1,000 part-time tutors, to deliver its broad portfolio of over 700 courses, which range from one-day courses to six-year part-time DPhil programmes. Almost all the Department's programmes are delivered in flexible formats to enable students to study alongside their work or other commitments and an increasing number of courses offer an element of distance learning. The online infrastructure and services to support distance learning are provided by the Department's e-Learning unit, Technology-Assisted Lifelong Learning<sup>3</sup> (TALL).

In November 2008, under its Transforming Curriculum Delivery through Technology programme,<sup>3</sup> JISC awarded the Department funding to undertake the Cascade<sup>4</sup> project. The key objective of this project was to address the financial challenges posed by the introduction of the government's Equivalent or Lower Qualifications<sup>5</sup> (ELQ) policy, by investigating how technology could be used to increase efficiency and improve the delivery of services associated with curriculum delivery. Following a process of stakeholder consultation, how to embed consideration of technology in the course design process for new programmes was identified as a key focus area for the project. This case study draws on the experience of the Cascade project to provide suggestions on how to support and encourage academic staff to consider and adopt technology to support the delivery of new, more flexible, programmes.

#### **2. INTENDED OUTCOMES**

The intention of the course design focus area of the Cascade project was to provide support and guidance for academic staff designing new programmes and wanting to take a more strategic approach to using technology to achieve maximum benefits, as well as setting up systems and processes to support this provision on a sustainable basis.

### **3. THE CHALLENGE**

The introduction, by the last government, of the ELQ Policy, effective from the beginning of the 2008-09 academic year, led to a reduction in teaching income for the Department of over £1.5 million. This potentially catastrophic cut in funding led the Department to examine its operations to look at how it could:

- Undertake its current activities more efficiently;
- Improve its offerings and their quality to students for an acceptable level of cost;
- Reach new audiences by adapting existing, or developing new, programmes that allow for more flexible delivery.

Despite a core of advanced practice in the development and delivery of fully-online courses, the majority of the Department's programmes were not supported by technology in any form. As academic staff develop new programmes it is essential to ensure that they properly consider how they might use technology and to support them both in making the most of what a VLE can provide at a basic level, and in considering how they want to use technology to deliver their teaching and learning aims and to structure their programme to maximise the benefits for students, staff and the Department more widely.

### **4. ESTABLISHED PRACTICE**

While there was support available within the Department for academic staff who wanted to use technology in their new programmes, not all staff were aware of this. In many cases, staff did not even consider using technology as part of the design process and those who did sometimes made decisions that were hard to implement or sustain due to them not seeking appropriate advice at an early stage in the development process.

### **5. THE CURRICULUM DELIVERY ADVANTAGE**

Effective use of technology in new courses offers the following advantages to the Department as a whole:

- Allows for more flexible programmes for staff and students;
- Broadens the potential audience for courses, e.g. through reducing the required frequency of attendance in Oxford;
- Ensures fully-costed and sustainable use of technology across the programme.

Developing the processes and supporting resources meant that staff:

- Considered the use of technology at the correct point of the course design process;
- Were easily able to access examples of best practice (see Figure 1 below);
- Were directed to the experts who could help them make the right choices for their programme.

The following feedback was provided by a member of the Department's academic staff with regard to her participation in project activities:

"I have become more aware of the time that it takes to deliver the different elements of online provision, so I have a sense of what is efficient and what is not, and which

elements represent value for money in terms of the student experience.” Local and Social History lecturer

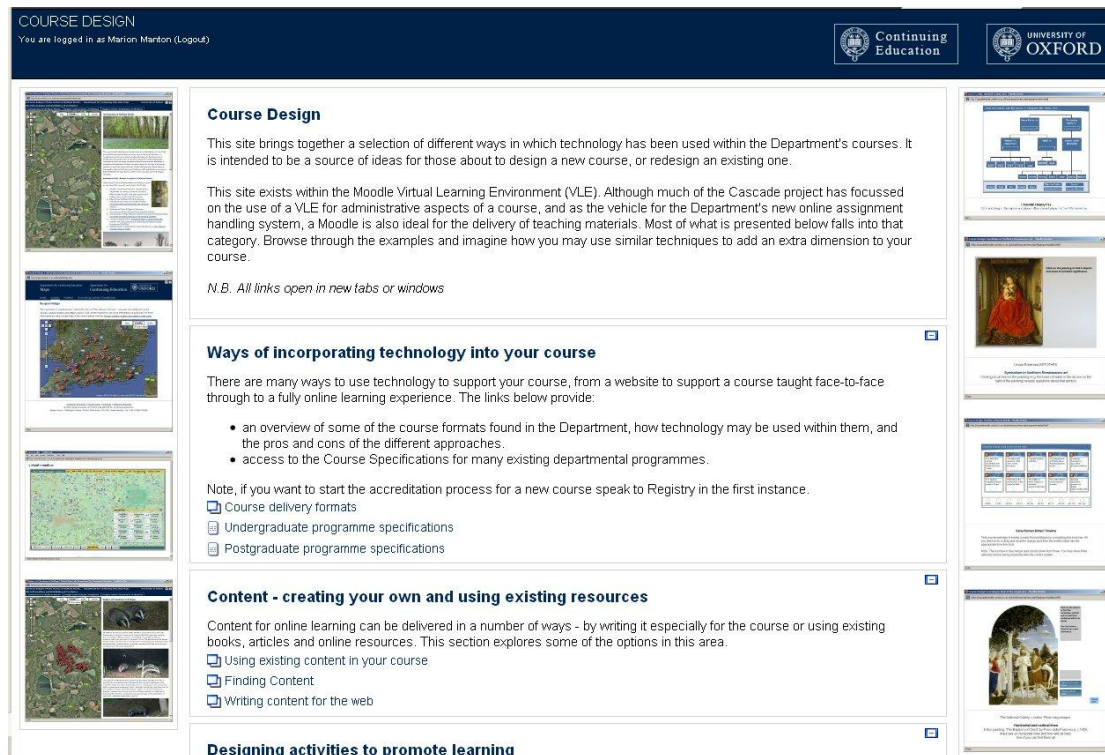


Figure 1: A screenshot from the Course Design Moodle, illustrating examples of best practice

## 6. KEY POINTS FOR EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

Outlined below are the key lessons learned during the Cascade project:

- (i) Make justification of technology use part of the institution's formal course approval process. Even if staff choose not to use technology to support their programme, by including a requirement to consult with expert staff and justify decisions in key areas as part of approval process, you can ensure appropriate choices are made.
- (ii) Capitalise on external drivers. The changes in funding of Higher Education, coupled with the increased acceptance of technology applications in more social contexts, has significantly increased willingness among academics to explore new models of technology to support curriculum delivery. When doing this it is important to be clear about what technology can genuinely offer to address their challenges and not to oversell what it can do.
- (iii) Help staff understand the full implications of their choices. Staff find it easier than ever to think of ways to integrate technology into their teaching and learning practice, but find it hard to understand the implications of their choices (e.g. what are you going to stop doing in order to start using technology); just adding more to a programme is not sustainable, either for the staff who have to teach it or for the students who have to study it. If you are going to use technology to deliver tutorials, what existing teaching is being replaced? There is a need to understand the real time and cost implications of the available choices.
- (iv) Engage with academic staff and the wider course team during the design, set up or review of a course, when time is already set aside to consider the wider programme and there is real opportunity to implement change. While innovation can take place

at other times, this tends to be complicated and often results in piecemeal, less effective solutions.

- (v) Provide easily accessible, inspirational and relevant guidance and support. While staff do not often find time to think about innovating their teaching and learning, when they do, make it as easy as possible for them to access resources and guidance that can help them. In particular, consider how you can inspire through examples of best practice that provide solutions to issues that will resonate with your stakeholders. During the Cascade project, a Course Design Moodle site (see Figure 1) was developed to provide a resource for academics to use when they need support to design a new course programme. This resource has been well received by academic colleagues and provides easily accessible, inspirational and relevant guidance at the point of need.

## **7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Using technology to support new course models that move a programme, either fully or partially, online can allow for a much more flexible offering to students. However, to ensure this is done in an appropriate and sustainable fashion, staff have to be supported effectively in this process, as it is easy to use technology in such a way that it creates more work without fully delivering on the potential benefits. Avoid this by:

- Ensuring technology use is considered at the right point in the course design process;
- Identifying where and how technology really addresses your needs;
- Providing support and guidance for those designing new programmes and wanting to take a more strategic approach to using technology in order to achieve maximum benefits;
- Providing information on the cost effectiveness and efficiency of different choices so that those designing new programmes can ensure their course is sustainable.

## **8. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

1. Department for Continuing Education website: <http://www.conted.ox.ac.uk/>
2. Technology-Assisted Lifelong Learning (TALL) unit: <http://www.tall.ox.ac.uk>
3. JISC Transforming curriculum delivery through technology programme: <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearning/curriculumdelivery.aspx>
4. Cascade project: <http://cascade.conted.ox.ac.uk/>
5. Withdrawal of funding for equivalent or lower qualifications (ELQs): <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/funding/elq/>
6. Outputs around course design, developed during project, are available on the Cascade project website: <http://cascade.conted.ox.ac.uk/project-outputs>
6. More detailed information about the work outlined in this case study is available in the Final Report of the Cascade project, which is available from: <http://cascade.conted.ox.ac.uk/sites/cascade.conted.ox.ac.uk/files/CascadeFinalReport.doc>

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