

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN E-LEARNING

Moodle

The open-source virtual learning environment (VLE) Moodle had been launched in September 2006 and feedback at the end of the academic year in May 2007 suggested a clear preference by both staff and students over the previously used VLE platform WebCT.

There is an increasing number of modules containing interactive elements in the form of Moodle activities such as quizzes, discussion forums, video and audio files. To monitor attainments of target KPIs the quantity and quality of e-learning resources across different modules have been categorised into 1*, 2* and 3* quality. The following data has been retrieved by querying the Moodle database backend and visual inspection of content in individual modules.

Currently Harper-Adams is offering a total of **479** modules across its courses of which **146** (30.5%) have a presence on Moodle, mostly in the form of text documents, Web-links, images and presentations.

The table below provides a breakdown of content within those 146 modules:

* Rating	Absolute number	% of Moodle modules	% of all modules
1*	68	46.6	14.2
2*	25	17.1	5.2
3*	12	8.2	2.5
Below 1*	41	28.1	8.6

The initial Moodle installation of 1.5.4. has been upgraded to version 1.8.2. during the summer in order to provide further functionality and stability to the system.

This upgrade required the development of a piece of software called *Identity Manager* which links student and module fields in the student record system SITS to the Moodle database thus importing students and module data automatically into the VLE.

Problems associated with the existing 'flat' structure of the Moodle VLE (module level only) have been circumvented by providing forums to Course Managers at 'Course area' level, as requested. We have also provided of students and staff to several non-credit bearing college-wide modules.

As a result of the departure of the existing Moodle training officer (see below) the support material has been redesigned and updated. The existing single session has been split into three versions, each for beginners, intermediate and advanced in order to provide more flexibility towards the different levels of current Moodle users. Consequently three separate handbooks have been prepared to deal with different aspects of Moodle use; the student Moodle guide has also been updated.

Moodle training sessions have been held for academics and academic support staff, and for new students and students who have been returning from work placement. Drop-in sessions for Moodle have also been offered TO students.

On-line Assessment

The existing provision of the Question Mark Perception assessment tool has been discontinued due to poor performance and inadequate support from the supplier. Various options for alternatives have been explored and it has been decided to use the enhanced features of the Quiz tool in Moodle version 1.8.2 to move forward. Various on-line assessment modules were developed and tested as part of the AMTRA Employer Engagement project (see below) and have been found to be satisfactory.

Virtual Farm

The objective of this project is to provide an online and current repository of data derived from the college farm and estate held in the farm information room which previously was only available in print format. The newly installed **Livelink** Electronic Document and Records Management System from OpenText has been employed to store the documents and files. The e-learning team in collaboration with the farm office has created a suitable Web-interface based on the **RedDot** Web Content Management Solution to allow consistent and user-friendly access to students via the Intranet; this will enable students to access and download up-to-date research data.

Work-based and Distance Learning Developments

The summer of 2007 saw the first work-based learning activities at HAUC to make use of Moodle. Two main projects have been initiated.

1. The MDS program saw the enrolment of 8 MDS trainers on Moodle in August, as part of the a work-based distance learners program offered by MDS; this has been followed by the first graduate students enrolling in October 2007
2. In September the first students have enrolled on the AMTRA program to undertake distance learning involving formative and summative online assessment to obtain CPD credits.

To facilitate this process on-line registration has been implemented and the College portal has been re-designed in combination with the Identity Manager software which will monitor student identities and accessibility.

Electronic Voting System (EVS)

The electronic voting system Qwizdom, popularised in a number of TV programs has been purchased in early 2007 and has now been installed on the lecture PCs in all teaching rooms. A training manual has been produced and training sessions have been provided for the A/V support staff; a few lecturers have expressed interest and will be encouraged to apply it in a class room situation.

Joint Library Projects

In collaboration with the library staff the links will be placed into Moodle to connect to the Talis list reading list software using the staff reading lists as source material; this

will facilitate the access and retrieval of journal articles from within the VLE. In a separate project electronic copies of past examination papers have been converted into pdf-file format and uploaded onto Moodle for student access.

E-learning Development Fellowships

By the autumn 2007 two e-learning projects undertaken as part of the ASPIRE Development Fellowship Award Scheme have been completed:

- (i) the development of an 'Automated Graded Online Assessment Tool' by Greg Rowsell and
- (ii) the 'Agricultural Machinery Web-site' by David White.

E Learning Team Changes

At the end of January the Head of e-Learning, Kevin Brace left the College to take up a position of Regional Co-ordinator in the JISC Regional Support Centre. His successor, Dr. Henry Keil took up the role as e-Learning Development Co-ordinator on 1 April. On 18 July the e-Learning training officer (P/T) Duncan Greenhill left Harper-Adams; extra funding has been secured and a F/T e-Learning Developer/Technologist will be appointed as of 1 November to strengthen the IT-skills within e-Learning.

Henry Keil
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