

Bournemouth University:

A new vision for learning

Background

Bournemouth University (bournemouth.ac.uk) is a modern HE institution of 17,000 students (with approximately 1,500 international students) based on the south coast of England. The university's current vision and values are defined by the 'Fusion' of research, education and professional practice. Aspiring to innovate in all three areas means that the university has prioritised the digital capabilities of staff: *'to deliver our teaching in new inspirational ways, to showcase our research, and engage in public engagement activities'*.

Strategic priorities

The university is committed to enhancing the student experience and seeks evaluative comments from students regularly. Feedback is captured via SimOn – an award-winning student engagement tool developed by the Students' Union (SUBU), through MUSE (Mid Unit Student Evaluation) and via the extensive student representation system. The data from all these sources is shared with the academic community, enabling change through partnership. Students are strongly represented on the Executive Student Experience Committee (ESEC), a key strategic body of the university, and at Faculty level committees. These mechanisms have highlighted a need for 21st century skills in the curriculum, and for continuing improvement to learning facilities including core digital infrastructure.

Following a **Changing the Learning Landscape** (http://ji.sc/change_landscape) project in 2013/14, which kick-started the process of institutional reflection, the 'Vision4Learning' project has been working to scope teaching practices and requirements across the institution, and identify learning needs. This has fed into procurement of a **new Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) platform** (http://ji.sc/bournemouth_new_vle), Brightspace from Desire to Learn, a new Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) strategy and the appointment of two specialist Academic learning designers to work on culture change. The university is also keen to align pedagogic practice

with the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) as it emerges and becomes established. In accordance with the 'Fusion' principles, changes to teaching practice are expected to be evidence-based, and digital initiatives are expected to generate transformational change across teaching, research and professional practice.

Leadership of change

Leadership of these strategic priorities is facilitated by the **Centre of Excellence for Learning (CEL)** (http://ji.sc/bournemouth_centre_excel), a relatively new unit located in the Office of the Vice chancellor. CEL leaders are research active and bring academic credibility as well as significant teaching and curriculum development expertise to the role. The CEL aim is to 'harness energy and provide leadership that inspires excellence in learning'; its activity ranges across subject areas and is strongly shaped by academic staff innovators and influencers, as well as by its partnership with SUBU. There are three senior academics, three theme leaders seconded from Faculties (including one leading on TEL), two postdoctoral research fellows and an administrator.

So it's a small department but we do have two year secondments from Faculties which is really important: they go back into their home culture and spread the word.

The **TEL Strategy forum** (http://ji.sc/bournemouth_tel) is a university-wide group that brings together academic, technical, learning support and IT staff to ensure an excellent blended learning experience for all students. Since its inception, the focus of the forum has shifted from awareness raising to sharing excellent practice, and from developing consistency in the user experience to building innovation partnerships, research-teaching collaborations, and action research projects. This is allowing a diversity of digital practices to emerge and a broader, more scholarly idea of digital capability to become established.

Actions for digital capability

The 'Changing the Learning Landscape' project (http://ji.sc/bournemouth_change_landscape) undertook an internal audit, identifying current levels of engagement and expectations of technology among academic and technical staff and students. This enabled the review of BU's learning platform to be broadened out to a study of technologies in use and of the digital capabilities needed to meet strategic goals, which has informed all subsequent activities. SUBU has included TEL perceptions and expectations in student surveys, and discussion at the SUBU Education Council has led to a better integration of TEL issues with general educational strategy and planning.

Activities for staff - led by CEL - have included the following initiatives.

1. 'Try Something Different' (http://ji.sc/bournemouth_something_different) was a campaign encouraging colleagues to take advantage of the new learning spaces in the recently opened £22 million Fusion Building, as a catalyst for changing pedagogic practice both there and in more traditional environments. This work is supported by Professor Stephen Heppell, part-time professor at BU and full-time innovator and pedagogic 'guru', who has challenged staff to be "brave" in trying new approaches, technologies and techniques.
2. A digital skills self-assessment test, (http://ji.sc/skills_self_assess) hosted in BOS, gives staff the chance to identify their own strengths and development needs, and also informs overall planning for staff development. It is based on a revised version of the Jisc Digital capabilities framework with additional statements from the EU Digital competences framework. Two thirds of academic staff have already taken the survey and it has proved 'a really useful tool for starting to think about what we want to do with staff development'.

3. A TEL Toolkit (http://ji.sc/tel_toolkit) was developed after the TEL theme leader conducted an audit of tools in current use. Mapped to both Jisc and the EU digital capability frameworks, the toolkit provides pedagogic and practical support for existing tools and includes the mechanisms to support and request that new tools be made available. As well as being launched online, a plastic 'wallet' was sent out to all staff with a memory stick inside, and cards mapping different pedagogic ideas to digital tools.



We produced a plastic wallet with a memory stick, with a card about the different pedagogies. We sent that out to every member of staff so there was a physical artefact as well as being launched online.

4. There is an annual CEL call for funded pedagogic **Innovation projects** to develop and test new learning and teaching ideas. Every year individuals or groups of staff are offered the support to take a new idea, develop it, test it out, evaluate it and then share the experience with the whole university community.
5. In 2015/16 the annual **Peer Reflection on Education Practice (PREP)** process focused on digital capabilities. Each Faculty came together to discuss what creative forms of teaching and learning could take place in the new and refurbished campus spaces and with the digital tools available. Every academic undertook to change one thing about their teaching practice, and nominated it via an online form. Members of staff have come forward from across the institution to become digital champions on the strength of their innovation.

In addition CEL offers case studies, seminars and CPD units, workshops in support of PREP, regular communication and updates through the CEL blog, and curriculum innovation days based on **materials from the Jisc Curriculum design** (jisc.ac.uk/rd/projects/curriculum-design) programme.

Moving ahead

CEL is working with a number of programmes that want to improve their NSS scores, mapping the formal and informal learning opportunities within each unit. At the same time the digital champions who were identified through PREP are beginning to support other staff to transform their practice.

BrightSpace has been chosen as the new VLE for Bournemouth, and adapting to the new system provides an opportunity for rethinking how staff and students engage with the digital learning environment overall. BU is planning its own DigiFest in 2018 to showcase achievements to date.

Finally, the Vision4Learning project has just appointed two new members of staff with leadership roles, working with programme teams to further embed digital practices at BU.



We've recognised there needs to be a cultural change. Not just people carrying on as they were, using a couple of million pounds worth of kit as if it were a repository.

Opportunities and challenges for the future

Bournemouth's 'Fusion' of research, teaching and professional practice offers a credible route for excellence in teaching to be recognised. All staff demonstrate the contributions they make in each of the three areas as part of on-going review and appraisal discussions. This allows for a closer dialogue between learning technology practice and the supporting research.

Staff development around the new VLE will focus on innovative pedagogies and teaching practices, providing an opportunity for all staff to refresh what they do.

Further new buildings are planned, and the virtual estate is being designed as carefully as the real estate with the same input from staff and students. Beginning to teach in new spaces is a key moment for staff to think about developing different approaches: to be 'brave' and innovative, as Professor Heppell implores.

The challenges are:



The same as everywhere. You have a body of staff who don't want change [and] you have this commercialisation where students expect an awful lot more, in terms of teaching and learning... as a right.'

BU is embracing these challenges, and remains committed to ensuring students have an excellent learning experience by setting high expectations for both students and staff, and now for the digital environment as well.

Lessons learned

- » An initial audit, overview or consultancy project can provide the momentum to kick-start a strategic approach to digital capabilities
- » The student voice is essential, partnership from SUBU has been a key driver of change
- » Strengths of having digital capabilities led from an Education Excellence Unit include academic credibility and curriculum impact



It's finding someone who can theorise and conceptualise in terms that academics understand... It's those more academic credentials that I think are starting to make a difference. Because it's an academic walking the walk.

- » Physical artefacts and real-world events (workshops, digifests etc) are important for raising awareness of digital initiatives, even though online resources may be more extensively used over time
- » Key moments for academic engagement include curriculum design meetings and annual faculty/ department reviews (meetings, awaydays etc), as well as beginning to teach in new spaces and with new tools
- » Self-assessment tools can achieve widespread uptake and engagement, but there may need to be alternatives (e.g. face to face drop-in sessions) for the staff who are most concerned about their skills and about the risks of being exposed



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Any unattributed quotes in the text were provided and have been approved by the contacts above.



For more information

on all related resources please see the Building digital capability project page.

<http://ji.sc/building-digicap>