



IATL Funded Project Final Report

Project Reference: 10-11/ST/Wilkinson
Project Title: Taking ARM online – developing rich distance learning modules from current taught modules
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Date: January 2013

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Acknowledgements

The project was funded as a Strategic Project Grant by IATL. The grant recipients would like to thank IATL for their patience with the project. Additionally they would like to thank all the staff who contributed to ensuring that the modules could move online.

Background

The main aim of the project has been to adapt an existing set of three teaching modules to an online distance learning platform. This will allow WIE to consider future possibilities for delivering an online doctoral degree programme to part-time international students and to further expand the modules that are currently offered for WIE's distance learning Masters Programmes.

In providing ARM online it is expected that this will help WIE to gain a greater market share in countries in the Middle to Far East. Previous experience suggests that educators within this sector are looking to the UK HE for training and development. As a result it would be possible to recruit a wide range of Masters Students who are likely to undertake the modules, particularly those who wish to take a more blended learning approach to their postgraduate education. Previous experience with online modules also demonstrates that PhD students are more likely to engage with the course. The Foundation Methods Research Module has been made available and attracts a larger number of students than were expected – currently the same number takes the online route as the number who take the taught route. The majority of the students undertaking this module are doing a PhD. The income generated by moving these modules online could be grown year on year and would thus be a benefit to both the Institute and the University as a whole.

The purpose of the project has been to achieve two main goals, with a third implied goal. The first two goals have been to develop practice within the department and to enable staff to gain an understanding of how to approach the transition of moving taught modules to a blended or distance

learning course. This will substantially change the practices in the department regarding course development and course material preparation.

The third implied goal is to enhance the students' experience and enhance their engagement through more involvement with the module. This aim can be achieved by incorporating scheduled online seminars. The experience gained by the academic staff providing these sessions will be transferred into the wider WIE seminar programme and other PG courses where students are not necessarily taught on site, e.g. the closed masters for CPD and the Teach First Teaching Leaders Masters initiative.

Aims and Objectives

The main aim of the project was to adapt three existing taught modules to a set of online modules.

The intended outcomes for the module were:

- To enhance the material used to make modules available online
- To change the attitudes of staff towards their approach to online and distance learning
- To develop expertise in the department with regard to online and distance learning for the conversion and the curriculum development of the materials.

The overall aim of the project was to keep the existing structure but add more content, allowing the student to gain the most while studying the modules remotely. Additional learning materials and comprehension checks of the students' understanding of the course were also to be developed. It was intended that from this rich content, including video and audio materials, that the students undertaking the course experience variation in the online delivery for a greater student experience. Additionally the aim was to look at how students can be assessed at defined points to aid with the delivery of the final assessed piece of work.

As part of one of the outcomes listed above it was intended that the academic staff involved in the project would gain skills required for future module conversions. By the involvement of the academic staff a new set of needed skills in the department would be developed.

Implementation

The plan for implementation was defined as part of the original bid process. Phase one was to ensure that discussion with the respective module leaders for the three modules was undertaken and that everyone involved understood the amount of work required for the project and also going forward into supporting the students undertaking the modules. In order to achieve this, a number of meetings were held and as a direct output the 'ARM menu' was requested and developed. The menu was devised to help the academic members of staff contributing to the project identify what elements were needed for the unit that they were contributing to. The questions asked the individual to identify what materials were already in place and where development of content was required. Additionally the form asked the academic to state the number of hours taught or contact hours, so that it could be ensured that each module was paced at the same rate as the taught sessions and that the weighting was in place across the module. Contributors were also asked to identify how best they thought the students might either interact with the units or the modules. From this information we hoped to identify how best to support the development of the academic tutors to deliver the modules online and support the students.

Once the menus were beginning to be completed, a single unit was mocked up and shared at a further meeting. The unit delivered initially was developed by the academic tutor who had previously worked on the development of the FRME module and understood the process required. From this a clearer understanding of the expectations were gained by the staff contributing to the development. This led to a number of staff feeling that their content provision was not substantial enough for inclusion. In turn the staff then limited their contributions to the on-going development.

Staff have been unsure of what and how to enhance the provision of the materials. Where staff have included video material, it has tended not to have been developed by them, but derived from a

resource they know about or already use with students in a face to face setting. When it was discussed that some members of staff be videoed or recorded, many shied away from participating providing a number of reasons.

A review meeting was undertaken by the project team to look at work to date. From this some of the initial barriers were identified, including lack of staff engagement and some staff withholding materials for provision. It was not felt that the two main individuals delivering the project were able to demand engagement and delivery of materials from the senior academics in the department. All attempts to obtain materials with support at the most senior levels did still not deliver one of the units. As a consequence other members of staff have been contacted by the project team with a view to seeking assistance in developing the materials needed.

Evaluation of the first students taking the modules is on-going. Changes are being implemented from initial feedback and further work is being undertaken to ensure the modules appear cohesive. Once a group of students has undertaken all three modules, a final evaluation will be made and this will be shared with IATL.

This report constitutes the final piece of work for this phase of the ARM project.

Outputs and Results

The main outputs from the project to date are the web pages within site builder that house the online materials. These are accessible to all members of staff in the university but only to those students that are registered for the modules. The web pages are available at: <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/wie/teaching/masters/arm/>; from the link the three distinct modules can be clearly identified.

One initial piece of work that had to be undertaken was the re-mapping of some of the course content to the actual structure of the module specifications. The taught modules are delivered concurrently but not linearly. Therefore the delivery to the students makes it appear as one module rather than three. As the majority of students attend on a part-time basis, the delivery takes place over a number of Saturdays and jumps from ARM1 to ARM2 and ARM3, depending on the availability of the staff to teach particular weekends. Therefore, in order to make the modules presentable as distinct areas, everything needed to be re-aligned into a logical sequence of units. The final mapping of the three modules can be seen in the appendices.

Part of the process worked through as part of this project was the development on a Menu or template which staff could use to identify the resources they have and the resources that they wished to develop. The menu was originally constructed as a template that the academic would complete answering all the components. However, this was also developed into guidance as to what needed to be collated, so that components of the module could be converted online. Both of these are included as appendices.

Additionally, as the modules are to be offered to students, the project has also produced course specifications for consideration at the departmental AQSC for approval. Copies of all course specifications are held by the department's QA Manager and with the relevant central university offices.

As the course is yet to formally run, there are no course evaluations from students that can be included in this report. As soon as a set of students has completed the online modules, the evaluations will be shared with IATL.

Outcomes

One of the main outcomes of the project has been the realisation of the academic staff involved that they can no longer just provide PowerPoint's and see this as a suitable support mechanism for online learning or distance learning delivery. However, this has also highlighted that initially greater input into the modules was required than had been assumed and the development of a narrative for some academics has proved challenging.

There have been issues with academics who have been initially very engaged in the project, but have failed to deliver the materials where needed. One instance was with a member of staff who resigned from the department and felt that the teaching s/he had delivered on the course was so specific to his/her research and own methodology that s/he took issue with it being included in the online materials once s/he was no longer part of the department. This caused some challenging issues for the project, also because the materials needed for the unit of learning then had to be developed by other staff in the department.

It is clear that the understanding of what is required for online learning has been grasped by some members of the team and has resulted in very high-quality learning materials being developed. However, others within the wider team have struggled and as a result the quality of the materials developed are satisfactory and have resulted in more work being carried out to adapt them and also to copy-edit them. In turn the copy-editing process has become challenging in ensuring that the student perceives one voice rather than the voices of at least seven different academic styles of writing.

Additionally, from the menu it became clear that the academics involved in the process were very unsure of the technologies and communication tools listed. Rather than being helpful once compiled, this showed that there was a high level of both digital illiteracy but also lack of real concrete knowledge about the use of technology to enhance learning, with the particular emphasis on distance learning. An example response was 'Pardon my ignorance, but I'm not sure how podcast and videos are different'.

Conclusions

One of the main conclusions that can be drawn is that converting three modules at once is a large-scale project. There are a number of factors that all come into play to allow for success on this scale. Additionally the number of people involved in the project in the provision of material makes the management of the system more complex. It also has the effect of making the copy-editing of the materials difficult as there are different styles and voices that have to be smoothed into one homogeneous resource which speaks with a single voice and displays a particular style.

Implications

One implication within the department of carrying out this work is that we will not endeavour again to complete the conversion of three modules simultaneously. In line with the conversion process we will look to maintain a smaller core team to complete the conversion, as this project proved that reliance on too many people can become the downfall of a project.

The implications for the wider university are that there is a model for looking at the existing taught modules to see what is available and where development needs to take place.

The management of the project is also important. Close project management is needed, particularly where engagement of the wider team begins to fade. If the slippages in the delivery of the initial Menus had been picked up and acted on earlier, the following development of the materials would not have been so complex or delayed for so long. This has caused repeated knock-on effects throughout the duration of the project, delaying the development on the online site, further delaying the copy-editing, and delaying the trialling of the modules with students.

Recommendations

Having undertaken this project, we would recommend to others looking to undertake similar activities that staff engagement and understanding needs to be achieved and maintained in a top-down process within the department.



Appendixes

Appendix 1 – ARM Menu Template

ARM Menu

Title:	
Number of taught/contact hours	

Learning Objectives (LOs)	
Do the LOs already exist?	Yes No
Do the desired outcomes already exist?	Yes No
If yes... where can this information be found (Handbook, page etc)	
If no... what are the LOs and outcomes	

Learning Environment		
Do you have a pre-reading list?	Yes No	
Do you have a broader reading list?	Yes No	
Where can the reading list be found/ what is the reading list		
Do you have any existing resources (video, audio etc)?	Yes No	
If yes... what are the resources and where can they be found		
If no... what type of resource would you like to use	Video	Yes No
	Podcast/ audio lectures	Yes No
	Quizzes/ formative assessment	Yes No
	Communication tools (forums, blogs, ePortfolios etc)	Yes No
If yes to any resources... do you know which area/subject you want resources for		

Content (not resources)	
Have you an outline of the session/unit content (i.e. have you a presentation)?	Yes No
Have you any written materials e.g. handouts, written narratives, other materials you have written?	Yes No
Which areas do you need to build on, what are they and how much additional materials do you need to create?	

Learning Activities	
Within your current taught sessions what interactions do you have? For example: discussion points; group work etc	
Can these be adapted for online?	Yes No
Do you need help in adapting them?	Yes No
Are there any additional activities that you would like to include? (please list them below)	Yes No
How many activities have you got in total?	
Is this too many/ too few for online?	Many few
Can you link the activities to the intended LOs for the benefit and/or clarity for the student?	Yes No
<i>Areas for consideration (is there space to develop/ adapt materials that allow for)</i>	
<i>Space/ questions that will encourage formative assessment (quiz questions that direct to a resources/ advice that check a student understanding without the need for tutor interactions)</i>	
<i>Formats that allow peer to peer support to be utilised or tutor support</i>	
<i>Strategies to support the development of Communities of Practice e.g. blogs; discussion forums</i>	

Support for Learning	
What current in session support is in place?	

Are there any key points at which the students need to or should be engaging directly with the tutors/ supervisors?		Yes No
Can you identify the areas below?		
Can you identify the technology to be used to support interactions?	Skype	Yes No
	Email	Yes No
	Forums	Yes No
	Blogs	Yes No
	Webex	Yes No
	Podcasts*	Yes No
	Video*	Yes No
	Screenflow/ camtasia*	Yes No
More details...		

* Development of resources to support a common need or question.

Appendix 2 – Guide to completing the ARM Menu

Guide to completing the ARM Menu.

This is a general guide as to how to complete your contribution to the ARM Online Module. The Menu has been designed to take you through the process of moving a face to face taught unit to an online delivered unit. There are a number of points at which you may want to add additional materials, please do so at the point where they are relevant.

Unit name and taught hours

Each section of the online materials will require a unit name (i.e. session name) ; this will be used to ensure that we are all talking about the same section and that the module leader can identify at a module level the order in which the units need to occur. The number of taught or contact hours is requested – this will be used to provide an indication of how many study hours the student undertaking the course will be expected to complete to get a full understanding of the subject area. Please indicate if you feel that the student needs more hours and how many.

Learning Outcomes

This section will be used as part of the introduction of the unit for the student. Where the learning objectives and the desired outcomes exist, you are not expected to reproduce them as part of the menu, but to identify where they can be found, be this online or within the ARM module hand book. The key here is to make it as easy as possible to locate. You might wish to reproduce these within the menu for clarity.

In addition to making it clear as to what the outcomes are to be, the unit will also require an introductory piece of text, which explains clearly to the student what is covered in the unit and how this builds on the foundation session provided as part of the FRM module.

Content (not resource)

Within this area of the menu we are looking for the information that will provide the materials for the student to undertake the unit online. The first elements allow you to establish that you have a presentation. Identify if more text/ a brief narrative to assist the students' understanding of the subject and a first step to build up the pages that are used for the delivery of the unit. This will be then used to construct the main body of the unit. There is an expectation that you will provide the bulk of this information at this point. Identify areas which you will need to build upon as part of the process going forward.

Learning Environment

The section on the learning environment is to allow us to capture what reading is expected of the students for the module, so that we can ensure that journals, books or chapter extracts can be provided through the library for the module. This will also let you make a judgement as to whether the list needs to be updated and to check the relevance of the readings included. Again you are asked to provide a clear link to the list or include the list as a whole. (You may wish to indicate where in the Content section specific readings are to occur and where learning activities are to be inserted.)

You are also asked to identify any other resources that you use within the unit. Again clear indication of what the resource is (e.g. a title and description) and its location are required. At the same time you are asked to consider if there are any resources you would like to include, what they are and if you need help. Again you may find it necessary to indicate where in the content or learning activity the resource is to be used.

Learning Activities

In the 'face to face' teaching you currently conduct for this unit you may use a number of interactions, these may take the form of discussions or group work opportunities, it is possible to translate some of these activities into online activities. There are other activities that may need to be re-worked for transition to online, but in order to provide an interactive online experience for the student we would like to capture this information.

Within the section there is also the scope for you to identify other interactions that you would like to consider as part of the unit. As there is no traditional 'face to face' interaction it is important that the student is able to interact online – this interaction can be achieved in a number of ways, but may form part of the bigger module picture as well as being part of a unit and form part of a thread running through the ARM online.

Support for Learning

In traditional unit delivery support is often unseen and presumption is made that the student learning will be supported. Asking for these to be identified, as part of the unit, will help to clarify areas that in your experience may be difficult for the student to grasp and help to mitigate these critical points occurring online. At the same time there may be key points at which student should be encouraged to seek support. As the person responsible for delivering the unit you are well positioned to identify these areas and to provide the indication to be made to the student pointing to points and stages where they should be engaging with their supervisor, fellow student colleagues or looking for additional subject/discipline specific materials.

Appendix 3 – Remapped Module Structures

