

The Challenge:

Determining which VLE was most ideally suited to deploy blended learning, enhance communication, and provide access to all students.



Coatbridge College

The Real Cost Of Open Source: Coatbridge College Selects Blackboard For Cost-Effectiveness And Ease Of Use

Coatbridge College is Scotland's oldest Further Education (FE) College, with over 7000 students and 300 staff. Servicing a diverse student base with varying academic needs, the College boasts a long tradition in providing high quality education and training, an illustration being named as the Training Provider of the year at the recent Scottish Modern Apprentice Awards Ceremony.

The College places its Learners at the centre of all it does and understands the importance of engaging digital communications to address the demands of today's digital native students. The necessity for a virtual learning environment (VLE) offering blended learning to its students which could easily and cost effectively be integrated into the College's infrastructure became very apparent. Initially, the College evaluated an open source solution attracted by the claims that it was free and could be readily adapted to the institution's requirements. This was then evaluated and bench marked against Blackboard's proprietary VLE solution.

Challenge and Objectives

Students' academic lives are dependent on the Internet, mobile phones, MP3 players, iPod® digital devices and social networking sites. The College's objectives were to deploy blended learning 100% across the curriculum, deliver a range of courses online, enhance communication between students and staff, offer every student an e-portfolio, and make learning systems accessible to all students irrespective of backgrounds, nationalities and abilities. The greatest challenge, however, was to know which virtual learning environment was the most ideally suited.

Strategy and Implementation

Coatbridge consulted with numerous FE Colleges to help draw up the short-list. To decide which model would be implemented, in 2005, Coatbridge undertook a three year, rigorous, stimulation pilot of two short-listed systems on the grounds of cost, staff and student feedback, and each system's suitability to delivering blended learning.

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Blackboard

At the end of the three year period, a survey of staff and students revealed that users found Blackboard's learning platform to be far more intuitive in terms of ease of use compared to the open source alternative. The pilot proved that Blackboard's solutions had greater reliability and resilience than its open source counterpart and was far better suited to achieving Coatbridge's goal of providing 100% blended learning opportunities.

The College contrasted the systems in terms of cost over the three year period. Whilst open source systems can be implemented free of charge, the pilot programme proved for Coatbridge that there is no such thing as a 'free lunch'. In fact, when the associated costs of developing and hosting the open source were evaluated, the real cost of the open source solution turned out to be far greater than the implementation and use of Blackboard's proprietary solution. During the three year pilot, Coatbridge realized as well that it would be mission critical to have a resilient and reliable infrastructure essential for deploying and managing a first class educational environment. After the pilot, Coatbridge made the decision to not only implement Blackboard's VLE platform but to use Blackboard Managed HostingSM solution to support its objectives.

Outcome

As a result, staff have seen an increased adoption in online and heavy use of online tools in courses such as its Professional Development Awards. These are customized qualifications designed to meet the needs of individuals and employers who wish to develop their professional skills in a specific area. The use of Blackboard's solutions has significantly helped those students with severe disabilities and mobility problems, enabling them to access all course materials online 24/7, and importantly to work at their own speed. This has been so successful that this model is now being rolled out across the College. For the IT department, using Blackboard's Managed Hosting solutions has enabled it to raise its profile by allowing its IT professionals to focus on helping develop the IT infrastructure in line with Coatbridge College's overall business objectives, confident in the knowledge that all issues of resiliency are being managed by Blackboard.

By using Blackboard's solutions, Coatbridge College has succeeded in its objective to develop an effective virtual learning environment and continue to deliver quality education, successfully engaging with its students, and placing students at the centre of all College activity.

For More Information

If you are interested to learn more on how Blackboard can help your organization increase the impact of education, please contact your Blackboard account manager.

For a complete overview of how we help engage and assess learners at all levels, visit us at

www.blackboard.com/learn

