UALL Work and Learning Network: Network News: November 2020

Welcome to the November edition of the newsletter.

The winter months of every academic year present their own unique challenge and this November, the challenge now includes the government announcement of another national lockdown. Once again, we must turn to technology in the provision of education, applying techniques learnt during the summer to facilitate 'hybrid' or 'flexi' systems.

Editorial: Technology in focus

Technology – a friend, assistant and sometimes antagonist of the educator. The year 2020 has proven, in many ways, that staying on top of trends and new developments can pay off, as developers compete to try and provide us with the best ways of communicating with our peers, students and employers. It's always been the case that those with the best connections are those who will succeed, but now this not only applies to your network, but your wi-fi too.

In this edition, we are focusing on how best to enhance your practise with technology. In a distinctive spotlight piece, Jim Nottingham provides us with a brief explanation as to how university IT departments have been working with technology to support key university systems, not as they were before Covid-19, but as they must become.

Editorial Team

Spotlight: Technology at the University of the Arts London: Getting Through Covid

Jim Nottingham UAL's Chief Information Officer

The University of the Arts London (UAL) consists of six world class colleges of Art and Design, these include The London College of Fashion, The London College of Communications, Chelsea College of Art, Camberwell College of Art Wimbledon College of Art and Central St Martins.

UAL has approximately 22,000 full time undergraduate and postgraduate students. UAL also has a large academic enterprise division which provides education, training and other services for a community of approximately 50,000 students. UAL occupies 14 core sites across London.

The UAL IT department consists of 170 staff which is made up of IT technical support services and a transformation delivery team. It was somewhat prescient that when we first considered redesigning our IT network in 2015 that we used a scenario to plan our new network along the lines of a major incident that would effectively close every building that UAL occupies across London. Our network infrastructure is based on what is known as a Tier 4 data centre in Slough. The reason we used this data centre in Slough was its geographic distance from London, its access to a JISC command node and the data centre being Tier 4 which basically means that it is almost impossible for the data centre to stop working. Tier 4 data centres have extremely high security standards, both physical and digital.

On March 18th, 2020 the University responded to government guidelines and closed all its buildings teaching moved entirely online in what we called an emergency mode. For the technical teams within IT services there were a relatively simple set of procedures that had to be carried out overnight which in effect turned our network traffic inside out. The first day was a little bumpy but after that first day everything settled down and very quickly became business as usual.

The lockdown didn't present technology with much of a challenge. It was more of a challenge to encourage academic staff and students to engage with technologies they were not familiar with, so alongside entering an emergency mode, there was a lot of additional training for staff using unfamiliar technologies.

The 'how?' question was solved, but then turned to 'how can we do this well?" For instance, at UAL a lot of assessment criteria were based on objects or kinesthetics (art objects, movies, animation, performance) which presented difficulties to asses within a virtual space. So along with a move to the online mode, the University introduced policies that enabled a fair and equitable approach to assessment especially aimed at students in their final year. This worked well and the vast majority of final year student were able to complete their studies successfully.

The University invested in some new technology such as video capture at the desk and new broadcast technology which included unlimited video storage (Panopto and Microsoft), and new portfolio tools such as Padlet. The size of our VLE estate quadrupled and of course we had to resize the servers and evaluate more carefully the far larger data flows. We also invested in a system known as 'Access Anywhere' which allows our students to log into physical PC's on campus from home and access all relevant creative softwares.

We deliberately prevented the use of some collaborative technology in order to encourage academic staff to place emphasis on using our own VLE environment rather than a scatter gun distributed approach. For an IT Service desk, supporting a distributed approach to platforms during the lockdown period and beyond would have been impossible to do.

In preparation for the beginning of the new academic year, the University decided to delay by one month, therefore pushing the start time to October the 19th. In this delay, we reduced the capacity of our buildings to less than 20% and rewrote all timetabling in order to operate in a safe way that aligned with government advice. So far this this has worked very well and feedback from the students on the blended learning approach has been very good.

In terms of the future, we are looking at expanding our online degree course provision, improving how the various digital services are interconnected, evaluating the impact of blended learning on our physical estate, finding out how our teams can work most effectively, and completing a new transitional strategy and getting ready for the 2021-2022 academic year.

Featured Follows

This month we turn our attention to sources concerning new technological approaches to learning within the university setting;

JISC

JISC is a pioneer of technology within universities and has published a new report and numerous subsequent articles about the future of learning.

Learning and teaching reimagined: a new dawn for higher education?
https://www.jisc.ac.uk/reports/learning-and-teaching-reimagined-a-new-dawn-for-higher-education

News
https://www.jisc.ac.uk/news/forget-on-campus-vs-online-the-future-is-blended-say-universities-04-nov-2020

Enabling staff to adopt new forms of professional practice
https://www.jisc.ac.uk/news/enabling-staff-to-adopt-new-forms-of-professional-practice-04-nov-2020

News about University leaders come together for new digital strategy framework
https://www.jisc.ac.uk/news/university-leaders-come-together-for-new-digital-strategy-framework-27-oct-2020

JISC has also provided great training resources for those hoping to improve their technological knowledge.

https://www.jisc.ac.uk/training/accessibility-drop-in-clinic

https://www.jisc.ac.uk/training/webinars-online-classes-and-meetings-from-yawn-to-yay

Recent publications

EDUCAUSE 2020 Student Technology Report: Supporting the Whole Student

https://www.educause.edu/ecar/research-publications/student-technology-report-supporting-the-whole-student/2020/introduction

If you have not seen these:

Future Skills – Future Learning and Future Higher Education by Ulf-Daniel Ehlers

https://nextskills.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Future-Skills-The-Future-of-learning-and-higher-education.pdf

The future of UK Skills: employment in 2030 by Pearson and Nesta

https://data-viz.nesta.org.uk/future-skills/index.html
https://www.nesta.org.uk/project/future-skills/

Work Based Learning e-Journal International
Volume 9, Issue 2a, October 2020, Dialogue & Debate

Special issue - Enhancing Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being: The Impact of Practice-based Research
http://wblearning-ejournal.com/en/current-issue

Upcoming

Registrations still open for the **EQAF 2020**

https://www.eurashe.eu/registrations-still-open-for-eqaf-2020/

Registrations are still open for the 2020 European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF), which will take place on 12-13 November 2020 in the form of online sessions. This year, all the sessions are free of charge and open to all interested participants upon registration.
Now in its 15th year, EQAF is the largest annual gathering of the European higher education quality assurance community. Under the title **"Flexible higher education: implications for QA"**, this year's Forum will explore whether quality assurance is fit for higher education's current dynamic and flexible environment. It will also look at how quality assurance could better support higher education institutions in the transition towards being more flexible and encourage them to make the most of it.

We would like to hear about your experiences with technology and how you and your university or industry are tackling the new lockdown restrictions.

Regards

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Read our previous newsletters:

September 2020

October 2020

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