

JISC

Effective Practice with e-Learning

An abstract, artistic composition featuring several playing cards, including the Ace of Hearts and the Ace of Clubs, overlaid with translucent geometric shapes like circles and lines. The background is a mix of soft blues, purples, and oranges, creating a sense of depth and movement.

# Case Studies

Assessment for learning

Oxford Brookes University

## e-Learning in practice case studies

### Assessment for learning

#### What is the intended outcome?

Learners develop their understanding through formative assessment.

#### What is established practice?

- Practitioners set formative assessment activities for learners at intervals within a course
- Learners are encouraged to understand the strengths and weaknesses in their performance through face-to-face and written feedback
- Learners have opportunities for reinforcement of their factual and conceptual knowledge

#### What advantages can e-learning bring?

- Online formative assessment activities, for example, multiple-choice questions and quizzes are available to learners any time, anywhere
- Creation of online multiple-choice quizzes by learners for other learners motivates and engages learners
- Online formative assessment reduces practitioners' workload and increases learners' responsibility for their own learning
- Online assessment can offer instant feedback and opportunities to reinforce learning
- Online quizzes testing conceptual understanding increase learners' confidence and therefore participation in face-to-face sessions

## Assessing your learning

Oxford Brookes University

### Background

Oxford Brookes University offers undergraduate courses in a wide range of subjects for study in full-time, part-time or mixed mode. e-Learning at Oxford Brookes is facilitated through 'Brookes Virtual', which integrates the WebCT Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) with a range of associated technologies.

### The challenge

First year undergraduates in law at Oxford Brookes begin their legal studies with a compulsory module to acquire baseline factual knowledge and to develop the skills in legal reasoning that will underpin all subsequent modules.

Paul Catley, Senior Lecturer in the Law Department, has been teaching this module for 10 years, employing traditional teaching and learning techniques in weekly lectures and seminars. However, learner performance was disappointing. Feedback showed that learners often did not understand what was expected of them until they were assessed. Furthermore, the module was taught in the first eight weeks, during which time learners must engage with new content and make adjustments to student life.

### The e-learning advantage

Paul Catley at Oxford Brookes recognised the need to build formative assessments into the course. Avoiding paper-based assignments, which would have created a significant increase in tutor workload, he created a series of online assessments delivered through the VLE. The quizzes were accompanied by guidance on the module examination in the form of sample questions, model answers and marking schemes.

A strong correlation was also found between quiz-taking and attendance at seminars. It has become clear that one of the major impacts of online assessment has been to increase engagement with traditional teaching and learning.

By using variations on multiple-choice question types, learner responses could be evaluated by the VLE and appropriate feedback provided immediately. Although by its nature, such feedback is generic and brief, this is compensated for by its immediacy. Indeed, one of the more common issues highlighted through course evaluation is that feedback is often provided too late to make a difference.

By using the VLE tracking facilities, it was possible to identify learners who had taken the quizzes and compare their performance with that of those who had not. It was found that the 'quiz-takers' performed significantly better in all aspects of the examination, including those aspects where higher order skills (such as evaluation and synthesis) were assessed. As feedback was provided automatically by the VLE, rather than by a lecturer, this may have enabled learners to diagnose and respond more effectively to their own learning needs.

### Key points for effective practice

- Not all e-learning needs to involve creating large amounts of content. It can be more effective when the tools available in a VLE are used selectively to generate smaller activities such as self-assessment quizzes.
- VLEs allow online assessments to be created by all practitioners, not just those expert in web technologies. However, a greater challenge lies in designing appropriate and well-constructed assessments.

### Final word

**While establishing a causal link between e-learning and improved performance is difficult, in the last three years, the failure rate on this module has been almost halved and the number of learners achieving first class degrees has more than doubled.**

