Digital Education Plan

Introduction and Context

The purpose of this Plan is to support the University’s Strategic Plan 2011-16 and to complement the Teaching and Learning Plan 2011-16. It addresses the objectives of the Strategic Plan and the KPIs which have been set around the use of the digital technologies and digital media in the Teaching and Learning Plan. It is also designed to ensure that the University of Lincoln has a digital education environment which not only meets our communities' and stakeholders' immediate needs and expectations, but which also positions us well to prepare for and negotiate an uncertain digital future with confidence.

The University’s strategic objectives for 2011–2016 are:

- To continuously improve our learning environment based on personal engagement with all students through quality research-engaged teaching and learning where students create and develop new knowledge in collaboration with their lecturers
- To promote an internationalised culture of enterprise and innovation across our communities - locally, regionally and internationally, working closely with employers
- To develop and promote purposeful knowledge and research and develop innovative practices working to support the changing environment
- To help students develop into highly engaged, employable and creative thinking graduates who contribute to the development of the society and economy

The University's Teaching and Learning Plan 2011-16 states the following regarding the use of technologies for education:

'Technology supporting teaching and learning is ubiquitous at the University of Lincoln, featuring the Blackboard Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and a host of on-line customised web-based tools. In order for students to succeed as producers of knowledge in their learning environments, it is essential that they have open access to the highest quality learning resources and technologies required for their work. The possibilities that may be created for this by developing multi-media Open Educational Resources (OER) need to be continually assessed developed and applied. The University will,

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therefore, promote the wider and more creative use of the VLE and other technologies for enhancing and enriching students’ education.’

While this statement addresses our internal needs, we must also recognise that the University exists in a digital global environment where a number of technological and educational disruptors are present. A variety of high quality institutions and consortia, particularly in the US, are making their teaching available through Open Educational Resources (OER) to a global audience. The emergence of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in the US and UK are increasingly providing educational opportunities online free of charge to those who can access the web. The use of technology across all aspects of the private and public sectors, from amazon.co.uk to gov.uk, is in a constant state of development, such that student and staff expectations around the role and use of technology for education cannot simply be measured against changes occurring within the HE sector alone. To the extent that the public sector is adopting a ‘digital first’ strategy, so too must we ask what aspects of the Lincoln experience should be digital first?

The boundaries between hardware and software, the physical and the virtual, are always in flux as we observe MP3s replace CDs, e-books replace physical books and YouTube, social networks, and online forums combine to offer new opportunities for peer-to-peer learning. In turn, the method of delivery for these intellectual goods is moving online, too, disrupting traditional long-established high street retailers. A plan for embracing digital scholarship will need to recognise these changes in the form and delivery of knowledge and be future-proofed as much as possible.

Such a fluid and complex environment presents both opportunities and threats to our institution; we therefore require an approach and a set of tools that not only enables us to navigate in an era of uncertainty, but which will also allow us to enhance our educational offer. The traditional educational experience might, for example, be enriched through creative forms of blended learning or we might enhance our international reputation through quality distance learning provision. Our staff and students will, however, need more assistance and support to help them operate in, and take advantage of, this more complex and dynamic digital environment. The preparation of attractive and engaging digital materials that can be used by our students and distributed more widely to enhance the University’s reputation through OER or MOOCs will require a clear plan for promotion, development, support and sharing through best practice. Students who are presented with a wide array of OER material, and staff who wish to develop, use and reuse OER, will need to be guided and supported in developing their skills to assess the currency, accuracy and authority of the available material, as well as its suitability and relevance.

The VLE at Lincoln (and beyond)

The University’s Teaching and Learning Plan notes that technology for supporting student education is ‘ubiquitous’ and the current learning management system, Blackboard, is by and large well-used and well-understood by the University community, although in some areas there is work to be done to ensure that all staff are using the system to meet the minimum expectations of students. Such minimum expectations may vary from discipline to discipline but students should be closely engaged to help determine at the most appropriate local level precisely what materials should be made available to them in digital form. Furthermore, where possible, assignments and feedback should be delivered electronically. This has

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2 See e.g. OU Learning Space (http://openlearn.open.ac.uk/) Open Yale Courses (www.oyc.yale.edu); Harvard, MIT, Berkley and Texas (www.edxonline.org); Princeton, Stanford, Michigan, and Pennsylvania (www.coursera.org). iTunesU, etc.

3 See e.g. Futurelearn (http://www.futurelearn.com/) led by the Open University (OU) and involving the universities of Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, East Anglia, Exeter, King’s College London, Lancaster, Leeds, Southampton, St Andrews and Warwick;University of the People (http://www.uopeople.org/), OERu (http://wikieducator.org/OER_university/Home); Khan Academy (http://www.khanacademy.org/); Udacity (http://www.udacity.com/), etc.

4 http://www.publications.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/digital/strategy/
numerous benefits such as allowing the use of Turnitin and the creation of efficiencies for all staff, including support staff in areas such as eliminating the need for the physical delivery of work and return of marks. Technology also has potential for increasing the diversity of assessment and forms of feedback. Using Blackboard for online formative assessment (quizzes, etc), the use of electronic examination formats and the provision of recorded oral, rather than written, feedback are just a few of the possibilities which currently exist. Furthermore, judicious use of the VLE (e.g. recorded lectures, podcasts, OER re-use) could ameliorate the emergent pressures on recording formal contact time and the use of teaching space. This could also have a positive impact on the KIS where forms of digital interaction may count towards student contact time.

We also need to determine the role which the VLE is to play in promoting our global ambitions. Development of OER can provide the world with a window on our University and help create a global brand which will, in turn, help secure our future. We already use the VLE in our work-based and distance learning provision in a variety of areas, and we need to determine whether and how this can be further developed for our local, regional and international communities. The notion that we can ‘stretch’ the virtual space of our campus is now just as important as maximising the use of our physical space.

Finally, if the University of Lincoln is to be a centre of innovation and excellence in student education as befits its Student as Producer ethos, we need to undertake a step-change in the way we use the VLE and associated technologies to enhance our educational provision and practice. We need to focus more clearly on student- and staff-informed innovation, development, evaluation and re-evaluation. We need to develop our virtual learning landscape as comprehensively and innovatively as we have developed our physical space, to ensure that we continue to deliver education that is on a human scale. The key to this is physical and virtual indeterminacy; that the boundaries of the physical and the digital blur and become indistinguishable, and that within these spaces the key drivers become quality and innovation in educational practice and delivery supported by a strong element of personalisation through individual contact.

VLE Vision

The VLE will be:

- An environment that supports research-engaged teaching and contributes towards the further development of an immersive and extensive research-engaged teaching and learning environment by enabling research to be situated at the centre of the teacher-student relationship.
- An environment in which student education is enhanced and enriched through the innovative and effective use of technologies, whether to complement, supplement or supplant the physical educational environment.
- An environment that connects and provides the opportunity for interaction for all the University’s communities and stakeholders, including staff, students, alumni, employers and the wider public.
- An environment that supports research-engaged teaching and contributes towards the further development of an immersive and extensive research-engaged teaching.

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5 The Report of the QAA’s institutional review of the University in November 2012 stated that, “The review team found evidence that, while some areas of the University use text-matching software to prevent and detect academic offences, this is not employed universally. Although the review team heard that the University plans to implement the use of such software across the institution by 2016, the team considered this to be a slow response which, coupled with the current variation in the use of the software, could present a risk to academic standards.” [http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/reports/Documents/RG1091Lincoln.pdf](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/reports/Documents/RG1091Lincoln.pdf), p6, para 1.6.
and learning environment by enabling research to be situated at the centre of the teacher-student relationship.

- An egalitarian environment where all resources and opportunities will be equally available to all students and staff, regardless of their device of choice or location, and in a range of formats to allow inclusive individualised learning experiences and the free exchange of information, knowledge and ideas.

- An environment that recognises the social dimension of university education, allowing students to collaborate in the design and delivery of courses and activities. It will also facilitate informal learning opportunities and the development of online learning communities through a range of digital systems and tools which will be seamlessly integrated through single sign-on, and which students can personalise to suit their own learning preferences.

- An environment that fully supports innovative assessment design and processes, so that assessment is routinely submitted, marked, commented upon, returned, and increasingly performed on-line, with outcomes and feedback integrated with University systems to promote the integrity, security and efficiency of academic processes.

- An environment that supports and enhances the University of Lincoln’s role as a high quality international education provider with a distinctive voice and ethos. Our engagement with OER, work-based, distance learning and continuing professional development programmes will increase our international profile and reputation, and create new markets for our academic provision, research and consultancy.

- An environment that prepares students for the future by supporting them in the development of skills and literacies that they will need to work and learn in a fast-changing, digital world.

Achievement of the Vision

This vision will be achieved by:

- Investment in staff support, the technological infrastructure of the University, including hardware, software, connectivity and technological support for all physical spaces.

- Professional support for staff to enable them to produce high-quality content and a high-quality learning experience for their students, where technological expertise is underpinned by a sound understanding of pedagogy and the University’s wider educational ambitions.

- Developing the digital literacies of staff and students to enable the full benefits of technology to be realised, regardless of the choice of device.

- Promoting and rewarding engagement with the philosophy and practice of flexible course delivery and the use and reuse of OER.

- Promoting and supporting principles of inclusive design, delivery, evaluation and re-evaluation.

- Reconceptualising the University estate to ensure a full synthesis of the physical and virtual estate.
Strategic Objectives

- Conduct a light-touch baseline audit of the current use of the Blackboard and establish appropriate KPIs against which to measure progress.

- Review existing institutional support for the development of online teaching and learning materials, in particular those to be licensed and released as OER, in order to identify areas of strength and weakness.

- Establish minimum expectations for the use of the learning management system appropriate to particular disciplines.

- Enhance the quality and diversity of material on the learning management system through the use of multimedia and open educational resources (OER).

- Provide high-quality, technology-enabled learning spaces (including capacity for lecture capture) both to stretch the University’s estate and to promote integrated and blended use of technology in course delivery.

- Enable staff and students to work independently, and/or collaboratively and support project work, personal and professional development, reflective practice and showcasing of outputs.

- Create and develop OER to promote and display the best of the University of Lincoln’s educational practice as exemplified by Student as Producer, and to showcase and maximise the impact of its research and creativity.

- Develop distance learning, short courses, CPD and web-based consultancy activities either solely or in collaborative partnership with other providers.

- Provide support for staff and create a cadre of School champions to enable staff and students to identify, establish and meet the minimum expectations around the VLE; to develop enhanced learning provision, including novel assessment and feedback methods and to share good practice.