Advance HE uses D2L’s Brightspace to leverage Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in education

Introduction

Advance HE’s purpose is to advance the professional practice in higher education to improve outcomes for the benefit of students, staff and society. As part of this mission, Advance HE champions teaching excellence and works with governments, ministries, universities and individual academics in the UK and around the globe, providing value to the higher education sector by focusing on the contribution of teaching to the wider student learning experience.

Advance HE recognises the important role that CPD plays in supporting individual development for those working in higher education. CPD is not simply attending a conference or an item to be checked off a to-do list; it is a way in which teaching professionals can transform their practice on a daily basis. Through using a virtual classroom in D2L’s Brightspace platform for reading groups and webinars, and working with those that are new to teaching, Advance HE not only helps to further CPD, but creates a community of learners globally who can interact online.
Technology has grown and evolved with education over time, as has the course material being taught. Within disciplines, there is a lot of room for experienced teaching staff to further their professional development, and for those new to teaching to grow in those subjects. However, without the appropriate technology many organisations may miss out on the opportunities available to them, which can impede the growth of both individuals and institutions. Without the right technology, organisations can fail to create communities of learning that benefit their teaching staff through giving them the opportunity to connect with a variety of colleagues, an opportunity which motivates them to further their professional development.

Unfortunately, many individuals who are new to teaching do not have the time or money to travel for face-to-face trainings and seminars, causing them to lose out on opportunities made available to them. In order for Advance HE to continuing being an innovative leader, and provide teaching and training content that is ahead of the curve, it needed a virtual learning environment (VLE) that would help connect its global community of professionals working in higher education, and inspire interest in developing their pedagogy.
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Professor Sally Bradley PhD, Academic Lead in Professional Learning and Development at the Advance HE

The Solution & Results

Advance HE is using D2L’s Brightspace platform in a variety of ways to not only deliver an engaging online learning experience across its CPD courses, but connect communities of higher education professionals enabling them to learn from one another on a global scale.

“Most academics engage in scholarship research, and learning about new developments in their own discipline, however professional development cannot stop there. It needs to be a continued lifelong attitude to learning and improving skills. Understanding developments in learning, teaching and assessment practice, as well as sharing ideas and resources with other educators, is incredibly eye opening – and Brightspace is helping us make this easier,” said Professor Sally Bradley HEA Principal Fellow, Academic Lead in Professional Learning and Development at the Advance HE.

One way in which Brightspace is helping Advance HE engage academics in CPD is through virtual reading groups. Virtual classrooms allow for rich discussion on a given piece of literature within a particular subject, and allows Advance HE to engage with a much wider community, generating interest in the practice without critiquing the research or research method. “We simply could not do this without a VLE,” continued Bradley. “These virtual reading groups allow for us to connect with academics all around the world and makes for a lively back and forth discussion.”

Another area in which Brightspace is helping Advance HE further CPD is by engaging those that are new to teaching, particularly in the STEM subjects. Previously, Advance HE had face-to-face seminars where they would engage with student teachers, however travel costs for delegates as well as specific days for seminars meant that many academics would not be able to attend. Being able to deliver content with greater flexibility, Brightspace can personalise learning journeys, therefore enabling Advance HE to give each individual the tailored experience they need to succeed in their own career. This not only means...
that costs for student teachers are greatly reduced, but that they can reach, interact, and learn from a wide community beyond a one-day seminar, but on a daily basis through an online environment.

“With the new-to-teaching programme, the pedagogy and literature is focused on the STEM subjects for a six week period, and those within the discipline can talk to each other online and engage with other students outside the UK higher education sector. Brightspace is giving early career academics a community within their discipline, which is amazing.”

Having an innovative virtual learning platform that includes real-time learning analytics means that Advance HE has valuable and actionable data, helping the organisation identify academics that have the highest – and lowest – engagement levels. As a result, Advance HE can agilely adapt their courses and deliver the material teaching staff need to acquire the necessary skills to develop in their role and improve student outcomes.

“So much of what encompasses higher education is now taking place online,” continued Bradley. “The great thing is that Brightspace is enabling Advance HE to offer blended learning – combining online with more traditional classroom methods – which supports the idea of continuous professional development. The platform is helping our colleagues experiment with resources and their own learning and development before they go on to teach their students with new methods and techniques – which is truly invaluable.”