

University College Dublin

Transforming online learning for a consistent experience

University College Dublin (UCD) is the largest university in Ireland with a student population of 34,000 and around 2,000 academic staff. Transforming through digital technology is one of the University's strategic themes that guides the development of students, research and the University community. In 2018/19, UCD introduced Brightspace to deliver a more consistent online learning experience for staff and students.

“With **Brightspace** we can see a direction of travel that very much **aligns** to the University's strategy.”

Trish Mountjoy
Head of Educational Technology Services, University College Dublin

AT A GLANCE

Client: University College Dublin
Industry: Higher Education
Website: www.ucd.ie

Platform/Features:

- D2L Brightspace
- Intelligent agents, learning personalisation and remote assessment
- Application integration and interoperability

Interviewees:

- **Trish Mountjoy**, Head of Educational Technology Services, University College Dublin

Highlights:

- 8,000 modules on Brightspace
- A single, cohesive online learning environment delivering a consistent experience
- Five online exam seasons of 100,000 student exam sittings
- Data analytics for student engagement insight

Challenge

To transform a multi-solution learning environment

UCD recognised the value of a learning platform and was already using a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), but this was independent of other technology tools in use. This meant that students and staff suffered the irritation of switching between solutions and having to log in and out multiple times.

It was an inconsistent experience and, added to this, there was no clear strategy on how to build on the capability to develop the solution.

“We had a slightly disconnected experience,” explains Trish Mountjoy, UCD’s Head of Educational Technology Services. “We had a VLE, but it was largely independent. It meant people were jumping around a little bit between services. Another point of frustration was our inability to influence or develop the service with the provider we had.”

A curriculum review looked at teaching strategy and delivery to identify areas of improvement. A comprehensive consultation exercise was held with students and staff to understand what they liked about the incumbent VLE and what they wanted from such a learning environment.

“The ability of the Brightspace platform to support learning outcomes and curriculum mapping was an area of focus that came out strongly in the review process,” adds Trish.



Solution

Brightspace at the core of technology provision

UCD established a project team to manage the VLE selection process. Focus groups and surveys managed by an external agency, as well as internal review groups were used to develop a far-reaching set of requirements and to refine the University's needs analysis.

A tendering process was initiated with four suppliers prequalified through the educational purchasing consortium. These suppliers were invited to demonstrate their solutions and were asked to respond to the Request For Proposal (RFP).

"D2L responded in a very thorough way and was engaged and responsive when we had queries," says Trish. "Brightspace is built on a strong pedagogical foundation, which resonated with faculty and is not something we've had previously. There is also a strong community behind Brightspace."

"Another area of focus for us is accessibility and the ability to ensure equity of access for all. Brightspace does that extremely well, in a very intuitive and easy to use way."

The implementation of Brightspace began in spring 2018 with an early adopter programme. The transition of modules began in August of the same year and the platform was fully rolled out in 2019.

"We spent a lot of time on migration plans and spoke with other universities that had made a similar transition," says Trish. "Obviously, we also listened to D2L, and they gave us good clear guidance."

Trish explains that by the time the COVID-19 pandemic closed its doors, the University had a high level of confidence that learning could pivot fully online: "We weren't concerned in any way about stability, uptime, availability or scalability. We had no concerns in that regard." To assist teaching staff, the team ran a series of workshops on platform functionality, including the use of intelligent agents and release conditions, and how to personalise the student experience.



"Brightspace sits at the **core** of our education **technology** provision. It is the start and end point for staff and students."

Trish Mountjoy
Head of Educational Technology Services, University College Dublin

Result

A single, cohesive online learning environment

The University now has an impressive 8,000 modules on Brightspace and has successfully completed five major online exam seasons, comprising 100,000 student exam sittings. A wide range of the platform's features and tools are used, including advanced features and assessments.

In addition, the University has introduced additional, complementary services such as plagiarism checkers, peer assessments and report building. This has been facilitated by the Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI) standard for applications integration and has been a particularly smooth experience where D2L partner arrangements exist.

Through the introduction of Brightspace, the University has achieved its aim of creating a single, cohesive online learning environment.

Students report that it is now a much more consistent experience across modules, layout and look and feel, whilst the Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Professor Marie Clarke remarked: *"Brightspace has allowed faculty to develop new and innovative pedagogical, assessment and feedback approaches which support our students' academic journey in real and meaningful ways."*

It was particularly important to understand how students used the platform whilst learning remotely through the pandemic. Faculty found they were able to get the student engagement insight they needed through Brightspace and identify where students might need more support.

Throughout, the University has drawn on the strong working partnership it has with D2L. "On both sides we listen to each other," says Trish. "We feel like our relationship and business is valued."

UCD set out to overhaul its education technology to deliver the integrated teaching and learning experience it wanted. It succeeded in creating a consistent, rewarding online experience for tutors, students and staff and can evaluate platform interactions through rich data analytics. As the University continues to deliver its 2020-2024 strategy, it will draw on its strong working partnership with D2L to continue transforming through digital technology.

For more information on D2L Brightspace for Higher Education, visit D2L.com/en-eu/higher-education.

"A lot of the time our students don't know they've moved outside of Brightspace because it feels so seamless to them. Other products are in frame within the Brightspace window."

Trish Mountjoy
Head of Educational Technology Services,
University College Dublin