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# Education resources in an e-learning environment

Sal Crow  
Assistant Librarian, Education, UWE  
Tel: 0117 328 2143  
E-mail: Sal.Crow@uwe.ac.uk

Emily Wade  
Assistant Librarian, Education, UWE  
Tel: 0117 328 2840  
E-mail: emily.wade@uwe.ac.uk

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E-learning has been a buzz word for several years now and at the University of the West of England the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) UWEonline is becoming more embedded. UWEonline uses BlackBoard as its VLE, modified to suit our university's requirements. Academic staff and students are realising what a valuable teaching and learning aid it can be, both on and off-campus.

It is proving particularly useful in the education faculty, due to teaching practice placements where students are away from the university for prolonged periods of time, and because many courses run at a distance and are studied part-time. Faculty staff are using UWEonline to provide students with module handbooks, PowerPoint presentations, lecture notes and e-resources to enhance student learning.

Since the faculty have begun to embrace this new way of teaching and learning, we felt it was important to show that the library is committed to supporting them in this (ad)venture. We began to explore the options within UWEonline and examine how tutors were utilising different sections and what resources they were linking to. We started what became a three step process of (i) assessing the content of each module, (ii) identifying appropriate resources for each module and (iii) creating the links to the resources.

The first part of this process was to look at the content of each module that already had a presence on UWEonline (we had decided not to add resources to those modules where tutors were not utilising the e-learning environment, but to

concentrate on the modules which were active). Sometimes the title alone was enough to give us a starting point: e.g. *Geography in the primary curriculum*. However, it was not always obvious from the title what the content might be: e.g. *Narratives in childhood* or *Becoming a person*. For these modules a little more research was required and we found it necessary to take a detailed look at the module handbooks and other resources referred to.

The second step in the process was to review the relevance of available resources, which involved assessing the links on the library's education web pages and carrying out a comprehensive catalogue search for all education-related e-journals and e-books. As we worked through each module we gradually built up a 'resources master list' for each subject area. In retrospect, we feel that a more effective, though initially time-consuming system, would be to create a master-list at the start of the project.

The final step was actually to add the links to the modules. As two of us were working on this project we felt it necessary to come up with a style sheet to ensure consistent wordings/phrases for each addition we made. We agreed to make **library** our prefix for each link we added, as we felt it was important in this first year of adding resources to show that these were library-initiated resources, demonstrating that the faculty and library had a joint policy on promoting e-resources. It would help promote our presence to both faculty staff and students, and show the library as a proactive partner in recommending resources and readings.

We also agreed on how we would describe each resource, e.g. explaining a link was to the home page of a particular journal. We wanted the faculty staff and students to see a library style within UWEonline that they could become familiar with and know what to expect from us.

The **web sites** link was chosen as the best area to place our resources, as this was an active link in most modules, or could be made active. It was also an area that was not over-used by tutors, so we felt we could make more of an impact there, as it would be a tab most likely to be investigated by our students.

When students log on to UWEonline an announcements page appears, so for each of our additions we placed an announcement stating that new library resources had been posted to specific modules. We used the date restriction

option to have the announcement disappear after a month, in order to retain a feeling of currency.

As each module has an expiry date it has been necessary to copy all our resources into the modules running for next academic year. This has been time consuming and we are investigating the options available in order to simplify this procedure. One of these options is to create a folder within UWEonline for each subject area. Folders do not have an expiry date and can be used as a central repository for the links and resources for a particular module. They can be shared by named staff who can be given read-only access or read/write permission. We are looking into how we can make best use of these folders and may use them to embed the links to resources and readings to simplify the updating of modules.

We were also able to activate a tracking of usage statistics, which will assist us as we come to assess the usefulness of the project. The tracker is able to see which areas of a module have been used and by whom! Statistics are displayed as a pie chart, showing percentage hits for each area (e.g. our library links would be covered by web sites) and it is also possible to find out how many times each student has used each resource, as all users have individual log-ins. The statistics have not yet been kept for long enough for us to properly gauge the success of this project, but early indications are positive. The web site links where our resources reside are being used regularly.

The education faculty have been very positive in their response to our input on UWEonline. We took the initiative for our presence there, but it was an informed approach based on our close working relationship with the faculty. This approach may not work for other faculties and institutions as each have their own culture and style of working. However we felt confident that our additions to UWEonline would be well received, as we had researched what was already available and only added links that we felt complemented and supported the tutor input.

This project is ongoing, and one we hope to build on over the next year, increasing the number and variety of resources available.