
Learning 2.0 @ LJM U: a staff development programme for learning and information services staff



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BACKGROUND

At Liverpool John Moores University, learning and information services (LIS) operates as a converged computing and library service and currently offers several channels of support through computing desks, Information desks and roving services. These services are predominantly staffed by information assistants and computing assistants, whose roles are rapidly merging. At the same time our students are inevitably making more and more use of technology-enhanced learning to support their studies. This also includes an uptake of many Web 2.0 platforms by students both recreationally and as part of their studies.



RATIONALE

It was decided that LIS staff needed to develop skills in using new technologies so that they are continually able to support the student experience, and in particular the ways in which students are learning.

In looking at ways of achieving this, we were pointed in the direction of McMaster University in Canada, and the work that their emerging technologies group had been doing on a programme called Learning 2.0 @Mac.

The McMaster model covered much of the information that LIS needed to cover and was used as a model for the core content, although delivery of the programme needed to be addressed differently.

'Learning 2.0 @LJMU' was therefore developed around the end of 2008 with the key aim of ensuring that LIS staff develop familiarity with some of the key Web 2.0 applications and will be able to apply this knowledge to LIS services through the innovative use of new and emerging technologies.

The programme needed to provide all LIS staff with a set of relevant skills and competencies allowing for them to support students in their application of technology-enhanced learning and to explore how technology can also enhance and develop support services.

OBJECTIVES

- to enable *all* LIS staff to become familiar with new technologies and the ways in which students are using them for learning
- to enable all staff to develop skills and competencies in Web 2.0 tools so that they may proactively develop LIS services
- to enable LIS staff to demonstrate innovation in effectively using appropriate Web 2.0 tools in their work.

APPROACH

Learning 2.0 @LJMU was developed as a hands-on, interactive learning programme that provides an opportunity to explore Web 2.0 tools and the impact these tools are having on teaching and learning. The development and delivery of the programme has been a collaborative venture between a small team of three LIS staff and two members of the learning technology unit. As one of the objectives of the programme was to famil-



iarise LIS staff with current technology-enhanced learning practice within the university it made sense to deliver the Web 2.0 content through the institutional virtual learning environment (VLE), so that LIS staff could make use of the technology in the same way that a student would be expected to interact with it. The development team then set about putting together a 12-week programme based loosely on the McMaster model but delivered within the Blackboard VLE, making use of the e-portfolio as a means by which staff could collate evidence of having participated in the programme. The blog tool and online discussion tool within Blackboard were used as means of capturing such evidence. Having mastered Blackboard, staff participants were then systematically introduced to various aspects of Web 2.0 and asked to perform set activities and to make use of an online reflective diary within their e-portfolio.

LEARNING GROUPS

The 140 staff participating in the programme were divided into 'learning groups' so that they felt part of a small community and had colleagues with who they could work and share their learning experiences. Each group was assigned a 'group leader', a member of staff who had some technical expertise and could also demonstrate leadership and motivational skills. The group leaders were made up of a mixture of information and computing assistants and subject officers. Their role was really to ensure that the members of their learning groups were following the programme and to assist technically if the tasks proved challenging for particular members

of staff. The 'learning group' and 'group leader' approach proved really successful in that it gave individuals a sense of belonging and support during the programme and allowed for a really useful staff-development opportunity for those taking on the role of 'group leader'.

DELIVERING THE PROGRAMME

The programme took place between January and April 2009 and all 140 LIS staff took part. Staff were divided into their 'learning groups' and were required to complete and submit an e-portfolio at the end of the programme to demonstrate their progress, knowledge and understanding. The first two weeks were dedicated to face-to-face hands-on workshops which introduced staff to Blackboard and to the e-portfolio tool. After this the content was delivered wholly online, with content being made available each week.

PROGRAMME CONTENT

The idea behind Learning 2.0 @LJMU was to give staff an opportunity to become familiar with some of the technologies that student are currently using to engage with their learning, and also in their recreation time. Therefore the following elements made up the content of the 12-week course. Prior to the first workshop, all staff were asked to complete a 'Web 2.0' skills test and a short reflection on 'what Web 2.0 means to them and how they envisage Web 2.0 being used within their job roles'.

Week 1 – Introduction to Blackboard and e-portfolio. This workshop was delivered in a face-to-face environment so that staff could take part in a hands-on workshop in which they were introduced to the Blackboard VLE and some of its basic functionality. Similarly, staff were asked to set up an e-portfolio and to include some information about themselves and to upload a digital photograph of themselves into their personal profiles. Other tasks in the workshop included uploading the two documents they had been asked to complete prior to attending the workshop. These activities enabled staff to get a basic understanding of Blackboard, from a student perspective.

Week 2 – Blackboard communication tools. This was a second face-to-face workshop, during which staff were able to consolidate upon the basic Blackboard skills that they had learnt the previous week. They were introduced to the Blackboard discussion tool, as this would provide

the means by which staff could provide evidence of their learning during the programme.



Week 3 – Overview of Web 2.0. The first fully 'online' unit provided a brief overview to Web 2.0 so that staff could become aware of the scope of Web 2.0 and some of the common concepts behind it. The unit also presented an opportunity to set out the format of the online units: a brief explanation and definition; an introductory video clip; text and associated websites; activities.

Week 4 – Blogs. Staff were now in the habit of accessing Blackboard on a weekly basis in order to access their units and activities. The tasks for 'Blogs' involved looking at a selection of pre-determined blogs, including two that had been produced by LIS staff for work purposes. All staff were then asked to commence a blog within Blackboard, using Blackboard's own blogging tool. Each unit also invited staff to make an entry into their online reflective diaries where they were asked to record their thoughts on the Web 2.0 tool that they had just discovered.



Week 5 – RSS feeds. This unit was largely information- and discovery-based, allowing staff to see the kind of information available via RSS feeds, and to think about them within the context of the library and the services they deliver.

Week 5 was followed by a blank week 6, allowing staff to catch up on the activities that they had been set. Group leaders used the opportunity to assess exactly where their team members were up to with their learning and to organise and provide support where necessary.

Week 7 – Wikis. Similar to the content for the 'Blogs' unit, 'Wikis' invited staff to discover and investigate a series of predetermined wikis, and to contemplate their use within a library and information context. All staff were then asked to contribute to their group's Blackboard wiki (another tool within the Blackboard suite) and also to look at and contribute to an external wiki, organised by the Learning 2.0 development team.



Week 8 – Tagging and social bookmarking. The purpose of this unit was to introduce the concept of tagging as a means of indexing web-based information and to allow staff to see how practical tools such as del.ici.ous can be applied within an academic environment.

Week 9 – Photo and video sharing. This unit introduced staff to Flickr and YouTube. Staff were already very familiar with YouTube, as content from YouTube had been included as part of the tutorial element in each of the preceding units.

Week 10 – Social networking. This was possibly the most controversial unit in that staff were asked to join Facebook as part of the activity, as well as looking at some more publicly accessible social networking sites. The activity involved discovering how other library sites had made use of social networking as a marketing and community-oriented tool.

Weeks 11–12 – Final group task and e-portfolio submission. At the end of the programme, the groups were asked to prepare an online presentation using a Web 2.0 medium of their choice, the purpose of which was to present an understanding of their knowledge of Web 2.0 and how it can be applied within a library and information and student support environment.

INCENTIVES

Participation in the programme was incentivised through the awarding of prizes for 'best group project' as part of the final task and 'best team players' at the conclusion of the programme. Funding for the prizes was provided by Ex Libris, the service's library management system supplier. This sponsorship allowed for a slightly different approach towards the delivery of the programme content and the commitment and enthusiasm shown by all those participating. At the time of writing the final projects have been completed and e-portfolios submitted, and they are in the process of being assessed.

FEEDBACK AND EVALUATION

An overall evaluation of the programme was conducted through the circulation of an online questionnaire to all those who have participated. Initial feedback suggests that staff found the programme useful and informative and a very useful staff development tool, relevant to their daily work. Many suggestions were put forward as to how the programme may be improved, including an increased time period in which to complete the programme. Also, drawing upon experience from similar Learning 2.0 programmes,¹ there may be alternative web-based platforms through which to deliver the programme, as an alternative to Blackboard.

At the beginning of the programme all staff completed a brief audit ascertaining their level of understanding of technology-enhanced learning at LJMU and of Web 2.0 applications. With so many staff taking part in the programme, and some of those being directly involved in frontline

IT support, there were obviously varying levels of understanding and competence within these fields. However, overwhelmingly, all those who declared no knowledge or competence as part of the initial audit demonstrated a massive increase upon completion of the same audit at the end of the programme.

A final channel for evaluation has been regular meetings with the group leaders, who have helped to advise and shape the progression of the programme, in response to the support needs of their group participants. The input of the group leaders has been fundamental to the success and further development of Learning 2.0 @LJMU.



WHAT NEXT?

We are now at the end of the first rollout of Learning 2.0 @LJMU. The evaluation and feedback from the LIS staff will contribute to further development of the programme for future cohorts of staff from other university departments. The university's staff development centre is keen to adopt the programme and have it accredited by SEDA,² and this will provide a further opportunity for LIS staff who have already completed the programme.

For more details see the other article by Leo Appleton in this issue of SCONUL Focus.

REFERENCE

- 1 J. Evans, R. Harrison, L. Jones and K. Thompson 'A Learning 2.0 programme: raising library staff awareness of Web 2.0 at Imperial College London', *Relay*, 59, 2009 [accessed 1 April 2009 from <http://www.cilip.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/93997F14-A1F4-4D3A-B32F-EB64C98BBD80/0/Relay59Sample.pdf>]
- 2 See <http://www.seda.ac.uk/>