

Mainstreaming a virtual learning environment to enhance the quality of the teaching and learning experience at NUI Maynooth

Relevant element of ESG:

Learning resources and student support

Abstract

In 2005, the Moodle virtual learning environment (VLE) was introduced at NUI Maynooth, with the main objective to provide mainstreamed e-learning support for all courses. Moodle carries digital resources and facilitates online activities. It enables part-time and distance students to participate more fully in their studies, and opens up possibilities for 'blended' learning in campus-based programmes. Usage of the system has grown rapidly: all academic departments, and many service departments, now use the VLE.

This poster describes our mainstreamed service, and collaborations across central departments to enhance access to digital resources through the VLE. The screenshots below give a flavour of the design and layout of the system, and how it appears to students. Finally, the poster highlights key findings from our evaluative studies, and our next steps in developing the VLE.

Mainstreaming the VLE

Moodle (www.moodle.org) was selected as our VLE following a pilot study and evaluation phase in 2004-2005. The mainstreamed service is managed jointly by the Centre for Teaching and Learning and the Computer Centre. The VLE is linked with our Student Records database, and our module database. This means that every taught course at NUI Maynooth automatically has a space in the VLE. Students have access to the VLE on registering, and editing access can be set up for staff on request. Academic departments and support services have collaborated to enhance the overall access to digital resources in the VLE.

Evaluation and Key Findings

Evaluation activities have been undertaken annually with students and staff as part of our ongoing development of the mainstreamed VLE service. The evaluative work has included: online and paper-based questionnaires, focus groups with staff in the first two years of the service, and more in-depth reflective work with students in 2008 and 2009. We currently have over 8,000 student users and at least 700 teacher/editors in the VLE. Our evaluations have shown that the electronic materials in the VLE are used pervasively by students, and that this is perceived as an invaluable support to their learning. The potential of the VLE to facilitate online activities is recognised, although somewhat under-exploited. A key factor in enhancing the use of the system overall is developing the extent and type of use of the VLE by staff.

Conclusions and Challenges

We continue to develop the VLE as an essential medium for the enhancement of learning and teaching at NUI Maynooth. Although there are many challenges from competing technologies, as well as challenges in accommodating diverse students all of whom are developing 'digital literacy' in different ways, we are confident that the VLE will continue to grow in its importance as a space for their learning. Enabling staff to develop a student-centred and interactive virtual learning environment will be our core objective in years to come.



1 **Welcome to the first week of your module**

This week, we will be looking at definitions of key terms for this module.

Please take a look at the resources below, and try the quiz:

- A simple page of information
- Website mentioned in lecture
- Module handbook
- Lecture PowerPoint
- More Course Materials
- Week 1 Quiz

Resources and Activities

This screenshot shows a 'topic' section in Moodle, containing a list of resources and activities. Students can download and save, or print these for further reference. They can also try a weekly quiz on their work.

Course categories: Learning Support

Sub-categories

- Access Office
- Career Development Centre
- Centre for Teaching and Learning
- International Office
- Library
- Staff Development

Search courses: Go

Support for Learning

Services supporting student learning – and professional development for staff – also use Moodle extensively.

Claire McAvinia
Centre for Teaching and Learning
NUI Maynooth
Maynooth
Co Kildare
<http://ctl.nuim.ie/>
tel: +353 (0)1 708 6287
email: claire.mcavinia@nuim.ie



NUI MAYNOOTH
Ollscoil na hEireann Má Nuad