City College Plymouth: Setting the standard with Moodle Medals

Summary

The TEL IT team at City College Plymouth have successfully developed a set of standards for courses within their Moodle VLE (virtual learning environment). Using a Bronze, Silver and Gold award-based model they have successfully enhanced the quality of materials, resources and content of courses.

The quality framework provided through Moodle Medals is helping teaching staff to work towards a much more structured approach to their courses, which provides students with a much better learning platform and repository of interactive resources.

About City College Plymouth

City College Plymouth is a tertiary and further education college and has two main sites: the Kings Road Centre in Devonport and the Goschen Centre in Keyham. The college is a partner college of Plymouth University.

City College Plymouth has successfully reduced its carbon emissions by 38% as part of the 10:10 project and they are one of the most successful participants.
The college has over 4000 full-time students and over 12,000 part-time students as well as over 1000 apprentices.

The challenge

Before the inception and launch of the Moodle Medals project the courses contained on Moodle did not provide a consistent level of quality. Therefore some courses were not be populated with as much information or resources.

The TEL IT team recognised that teaching staff were not as engaged in producing courses in Moodle of an acceptable standard. In addition, this meant that the students were not being provided with interactive or engaging content within Moodle for their courses.

At the launch of the project, the TEL IT team initially had some resistance from staff, so they decided to run a ‘going for gold’ campaign to try and make staff more aware of the project and their aims and objectives for it.

Another driver was the fact that the college needed to improve their Moodle environment to comply with the minimum standards for a forthcoming Ofsted inspection. This was one of the main reasons why the TEL IT team were very keen to improve standards and ensure that all courses could offer students the resources and information they needed.

The activity

The idea for Moodle Medals came as a result of the TEL IT team having attended several Jisc RSC South West events, which highlighted their successful use by other colleges in the region.

The process of setting up the standards was one that was written in line with an implementation plan and involved several processes before being agreed by the senior management team. This helped because the team were able to get approval to make changes and develop training sessions to support the changes.

Once agreed, the TEL IT team decided to go with the model of Bronze, Silver and Gold standards. These are recognised standards that are openly available to download from the Moodle website.

Screenshot showing the Bronze, Silver and Gold medal awards
In order to make the process easier for staff, the TEL IT team produced a detailed spreadsheet for Teaching Staff to review, which contained all the pre-requisite requirements needed to gain an award.

In terms of the requirements needed for each award, the TEL IT team have broken these down into the following specific areas:

- Accessibility
- Course information
- Resources for lessons
- Use of media
- Assessments/assignments
- VLE course information
- (For silver and gold) VLE course evaluation

The following bullet points show a breakdown of the kind of criteria needed in order to achieve each Moodle Medal:

**Bronze award**

- There should be at least three uploaded PDF documents
- Easy navigation with course menu or similar
- Student handbook or course planner/suitable document uploaded
- Calendar
- Visible reading or resource list – books, journals, websites where appropriate
- Glossary
- Use of images – at least one relevant topic/course related image
- Separate assessment or assignment schedule or equivalent
- 50% of enrolled students are active participants *(in the last half-term period or from start of academic year if in first term)*.

**Silver award**

In terms of the silver requirements, they must contain all the elements of the bronze award as well as the following additional requirements:

- Direct tutor email links
- Calendar used for communicating messages to students
- Live links from Reading List to LMS (Library Management System) & to e-books
- Live links to web sites
- Interactive Glossary
- Audio / videos (links or embedded)/games-based learning
- Use of a quiz (e.g. Moodle Quiz tool, Optivote, online tools)
- Gradebook (linked to assignments)
- 75% of enrolled participating students are active
- 33% of active students give average rating of 3 stars or above *(in the last half-term period or from start of academic year if in first term)*.
In terms of the gold award, the courses must contain all the elements of the bronze award as well as the following additional requirements:

- Google translation tool and Web based documents (held off site for interactivity)
- Assistive technology
  - Tutor profiles
- Photos or Avatars of tutors
- Student participation - sharing resources
- Use of RSS feeds (automatic web news updates)
- Active use of chat/blogs
- Media creation for learning (audio/video/games)
- A variety of quizzes
- Feedback to students
- Gradebook – extensive use
- 90% of participating students are active *(in the last half-term period or from start of academic year if in first term)*
- 50% of active students give average rating of four stars or above

“I think it’s allowed teaching staff to try and achieve a better medal going on from bronze, it’s getting through to some parts of the college where they really do get very competitive about wanting to be the first to achieve a silver medal” – Gareth Watkins, ILT Development Programmer

**The outcomes**

By introducing Moodle medals the college have made much progress in terms of providing teaching staff with not only the tools to make their courses within Moodle more engaging, but also by providing a mechanism to encourage staff to make improvements.

“It’s given a framework for everyone to work towards, so it’s a more structured layout to Moodle and it’s made it clearer” – Adam Harvey, Learning Technology Manager

The medals have made teaching staff more interested in developing their courses to a minimum standard and beyond. This in part has been encouraged due to introducing a competitive aspect to the medals. This means that staff are more involved and interested in gaining awards. In addition, the introduction of the medals has set a benchmark for this department, which is attractive for senior management teams

Students are getting much more out of the VLE and their courses through Moodle, especially if their courses have gained a silver rating, which contains more interactive resources and materials. It has provided a more immersive environment and one in which students can be more engaged with.
As a direct result of the introduction of Moodle Medals, some teaching staff now deliver all their teaching exclusively through Moodle, an unexpected outcome for the TEL IT team.

The college additionally publish a staff bulletin, which publicises staff achievements and also when medals have been awarded. This is the kind of activity that generates interest across departments and is something that can be cited by academic managers.

**The impact**

Since the medals have been introduced, the TEL IT team have seen a rise to 96% compliance for all courses on Moodle for the minimum standards. For the bronze standard the TEL IT team have seen a rise from 3-5% of courses meeting this standard for last year, to between 12-15% for bronze awards for the current academic year.

“I think that the general standard has gone up I think. People are definitely being a lot more interactive with Moodle and I have seen a rise in the number of silver awards being handed out” - Phil Wright, Taxonomy Developer

“It’s changing the culture here and definitely about getting a lot of staff to see that change and gradually I think it’s working” - Gareth Watkins, ILT Development Programmer

**The lessons learned**

In hindsight the TEL IT team felt that they should have involved the students from the start of the project, rather than halfway through the process.

The TEL IT team have also learned that it’s important to be supportive and help staff to make a smooth transition to the new process.

“Be friendly and helpful and supportive in training and helping people and you certainly need a degree of flexibility.” - Adam Harvey, Learning Technology Manager

They also think that it may have been a good idea to introduce Moodle Badges as at the same time as Moodle Medals. Badges are a way of awarding individuals with merit for their hard work, as opposed to Medals, which award a particular department.

**Useful links**

City College Plymouth
Jisc RSC South West

Moodle

Gold, Silver and Bronze Moodle plugins

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