South Birmingham College: Individual learning plans in Moodle

Summary

South Birmingham college has developed new online Individual Learning Plan (ILPs) to reflect the recently revised paper-based ILPs. The online ILPs have been integrated into the college’s virtual learning environment, Moodle.

About South Birmingham College

South Birmingham College is based at four campuses, each with their own specialism, close to Birmingham city centre. This includes one of the biggest construction training centres in the country in Bordesley Green.

With over 1,000 courses to choose from, the college caters for a wide range of students. It has its own channel on YouTube, where prospective students can find out more about courses and the college environment.

The challenge

The college recently saw a change in format of its paper-based Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) which allow students to set objectives and track their learning progress through a particular course or subject. This change meant that the paper ILPs no longer mapped to the online equivalent.

The e-learning development team initially looked at the Personal Learning Plan (PLP) plugin for Moodle, developed by the University of London Computer Centre (ULCC) and made freely available to the Moodle community. However, the PLP didn’t fit the college’s needs. They also decided against updating the existing online ILP for practical reasons.

The activity

Many colleges develop a bespoke ILP as each organisation’s needs differ. During the Summer of 2008, South Birmingham College developed their own version of the ILP for Moodle and made it available at the start of the academic year.

The old online ILP used some Moodle features to support the process, whereas the new plan mirrors the entire paper-based ILP.
The new ILP:

- Allows tutors to track the whole induction process
- Features collaborative, interactive target setting activities which can be edited by both staff and students
- Provides reports and print outs of different views
- Allows the tutor to see the ILPs for all students on the course he/she teaches and view all courses that he/she teaches
- Links course codes to the ILP database

Students must complete a series of disclaimers covering data protection and code of conduct before progressing to action plans and target setting.

The new online ILP is initially being trialled with around 1,000 students spanning 60 courses. The project cohort comprises full time students.

**The outcomes**

Evaluation of the ILP is ongoing. The e-Learning team has set up an e-mail group and questionnaires to gather feedback. One of the tutors is doing a comparative study between the online and paper-based versions.

Feedback from the students will be gathered through future learner choice meetings, where students have the opportunity to express their views and opinions.

**The impact**

Initial responses so far have been predominantly from tutors. Feedback and comments on the ILP includes:

- Provides opportunities for students to use and develop ILT skills
- 24/7 access
- It's easier to use and saves having to carry big folders around
- Reduces the amount of paperwork
- The system has made auditing easier
- More accessible and engaging – the ILP process is usually demanding for both staff and students
- Makes the planning process easier
Although the new ILP process is still being trialled, plans are in place to give it more of a Facebook look and feel to appeal to students and encourage further and increased use. This would include the addition of features such as icons and personal blogs.

Jane Sisk, Assistant Director of the e-Learning Team adds, “In a separate project, we are also trialling two commercial e-portfolio products but they are very work-based learning driven. It has led to the question what is a portfolio? Is the ILP part of an e-portfolio or something different entirely? It’s something we need to explore more through the trials of both e-portfolios and the ILP.”

She adds, “South Birmingham is such a large college which offers different types of provision. For us, there is no one size fits all solution but the new ILP so far has proved a great option for all our full-time courses and Foundation degrees.”

Useful links

South Birmingham College

Individual Learning Plan module for Moodle

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