Developing Digital Excellence staff development programme

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In September 2012 a cohesive staff development programme was launched at Edge Hill University, designed to cater for a wide range of staff personal and professional development needs. Four key themes provide structure to the programme, which aims to support staff use of technologies in the classroom, the office, when teaching and as a researcher.

Learning Services has a long history of delivering staff development across the university, and is probably best known for staff development in ICT. However, over the past few years we have become involved in supporting institutional initiatives in terms of mainstreaming the virtual learning environment (VLE) and the greater emphasis on research. We also used evidence from the annual student eLearning survey to look at staff skills requirements for effective use of the VLE. There is compelling evidence that students are frustrated by the lack of ICT and digital skills of some staff, and the variable use of the VLE from module to module can have an impact on their overall experience at Edge Hill.

The Learning Services management team made the decision in the summer of 2012 that the 2012/13 staff development programme would be themed, with an identifiable name and brand to aid promotion. It was hoped that this would increase visibility and relevance and, consequently, the numbers of staff engaging with the programme.

A steering group was established to design the programme, with membership consisting of managers plus Learning Services staff who had previously delivered staff development sessions. The steering group met twice in the summer to plan the programme themes and session topics.

The steering group assessed evaluation feedback and attendance records from the programme of the previous year in order to identify areas of high relevance to include again. The group also identified areas of growth for the university (such as research) and change (such as mobile technology developments), to add to the new programme. The resulting four themes that emerged were: the digital classroom, digital office, digital practitioner and digital researcher.

The digital classroom

This theme aimed to improve staff confidence and competence in using the technology available in all teaching rooms and lecture theatres, including sessions on:
- using audio and visual technologies in classrooms and lecture theatres
- getting the best out of interactive and non-interactive boards
- using tools to engage students and get feedback in the classroom.

The digital office

This theme aimed to develop best practice and efficient use of desktop applications in the workplace, including sessions on:

- using ICT in the office
- enhancing presentations
- folders and file management
- producing long documents.

The digital practitioner

This theme aimed to increase staff knowledge in the use of the virtual learning environment and other educational technologies, including sessions on:

- the development of Learning Edge (Black-board VLE) and related tools
- mobile learning
- ePortfolios and ePDP
- emerging technologies.

THE DIGITAL RESEARCHER

This theme aimed to increase the awareness and confidence of research staff in using technology to support their work, including sessions on:

- systematic reviews
- managing your references
- using Web 2.0 in research.

The programme was planned to be inclusive of all staff, with sessions to support a wide variety of roles across the university. For example, academic staff could attend sessions to enhance their ICT skills or administrators could attend sessions to get more involved with the virtual learning environment.

Within the programme, there were sessions at different levels to ensure staff could attend a session most appropriate to their current knowledge level. Sessions ranged from awareness-raising (no prior knowledge needed) to enhancement (some prior skill / knowledge required).

In terms of timing, a decision was taken that some delivery of sessions would take place in semester 1, although this is a very busy time for staff; therefore more sessions would be scheduled from January 2013. If staff could not attend a scheduled session or an alternative topic was required, a bespoke session could be tailored to meet their needs.

To deliver the sessions a wide variety of staff from across Learning Services were involved, depending on their area of expertise. The Media and ICT team, the staff involved in classroom support, delivered the digital office and digital classroom strands. The Learning Technology Development team, who regularly work with academic colleagues to enhance the use of the VLE and other technologies for learning, teaching and assessment, delivered the digital practitioner strand.

Academic Support Division librarians, who specialise in research support, delivered the majority of the digital researcher sessions, with support from the learning technologists. These sessions were devised in consultation with the university Research Enterprise and Support Office to ensure

they complemented their research support activities.

In designing the programme, a professional branding exercise was undertaken to determine the name of the programme – Developing Digital Excellence (DDE) – and the fundamental areas of focus and topics were decided upon. This was followed by graphical design work to create a recognisable trademark image that would be central to the marketing strategy – and thus, the digital excellence light bulb was born! This symbol of inspiration is used to promote the programme via a range of media formats, on campus plasma screens, floor banners, posters, bookmarks, blog posts and other social media channels.

The programme is very much a collaboration with our central Human Resources (HR) Staff Development Unit, as they are responsible for managing development needs. Bookings for events are made via an HR central booking system which is linked to staff records. Therefore one of our communication channels is the central HR weekly staff development news which is emailed to all staff.

We have been able to be a little more imaginative and creative with other elements of the campaign and use both print and digital media:

- monthly blogs that outline briefly what's going on for the coming month. We currently use both the Learning Services and Learning

Edge blog. (The latter is aimed at academic staff to promote the development of our VLE and also to showcase existing innovative Technology Enhanced Learning practice.)

- emails to departments from librarians and learning technologists
- DDE plasma screen adverts across campus
- posters in departments: We have worked with HR business advisers to ensure they can discuss team staff development needs and also promote the programme.
- distribution of bookmarks to new staff and at appropriate staff meetings
- DDE brand on a banner placed in a central area of the university that most staff pass on a daily or weekly basis
- highlights of forthcoming events and feedback from previous sessions is a key part of the Learning Services update which our staff present at programme boards and departmental meetings.
- use of the Learning Services internal wiki to promote the whole programme for each of the four strands. Feedback is that staff find this useful as they plan their diaries for a term.

Branding the programme with the light bulb has proved effective as staff see it across the across the university, both digitally and on posters in buildings. It certainly has become very recognisable!

In addition to the face-to-face events, an open access online course environment on Learning Edge (Blackboard 91) provides staff with a one-stop-shop to browse events, contact facilitators, communicate with other colleagues and access a wealth of self-help information.

The primary benefits of using the VLE to supplement in-class staff development activity include:

- an opportunity to model good practice using the VLE
- an opportunity for staff to experience using the VLE from a 'student' perspective
- a single location to collate session resources for use before, during and after events.

The following screenshots provide a guided tour of the key components:

The course homepage (fig. 1) welcomes staff and outlines the help that is available. Staff are encouraged to browse the sessions and schedule time into their diary to attend.

The course menu is neatly structured to provide first-time and returning users with a simple hierarchy that is quick to navigate and supports both desktop and mobile access.

The course notifications page (fig. 2) provides a dashboard displaying the latest news and activity taking place within the course space. Staff can self enrol on the course in order to sign up for notifications on their mobile device.

From the course menu, one click takes the user to a programme information page (fig. 3) which provides a simple starting point for finding relevant session information and materials.

Within each themed programme area, session events are presented chronologically by term in order to assist staff searching for sessions they wish to sign up to in the future, or to revisit from previous months.

Sessions events each have an individual content page to collate information and links to activities that use the course tools. The mobile field trip event page (fig. 4) demonstrates the full range of mobile-compatible features and provides a range of resources for use before, during and after attending the supported session.

The one common element to each event page is the provision of detailed information about what to expect from the session, when and where it will take place as well as links to make a booking.

Finally, the 'make a suggestion' discussion forum and 'contacts' page links, which are accessible from the course menu, provide easy access for staff wishing to ask questions or make requests for additional or alternative bespoke support.

Next steps for the course include greater use of the communication tools and integration of social media channels (such as Twitter and Facebook) to help the area continue to develop into a dynamic, relevant and active community of digital practitioners.

Statistics or 'Keeping powerful information': KPIs!

As a service we have been developing a number of key performance indicators (KPIs), and using our statistics as a metric. We regard as a KPI the value placed by the university as a whole on our staff and support (our customer service excellence). The number of sessions we deliver, and the

attendance at the sessions, contribute statistically to this KPI.

To evaluate the quality of our staff development provision and inform the development of future session and programme events, all attendees are contacted via email and invited to provide anonymous feedback via an online form.

We also maintain monthly event and attendance records and have constructed simple dashboards to display key statistical information at a glance. These dashboards are also available to be exported into pdf formats and shared with senior managers across the university to assist with communication and decision making. Using simple visual graphics, senior managers can quickly access information about the number and types of events taking place, the volume of uptake –at either scheduled or bespoke events – and variation in levels of engagement by faculty. This information is used in conjunction with other enquiry tracking data, in order to gauge the preparedness of staff for certain new developments.

At a planning meeting in the summer we shall use the statistics, evaluations and feedback to plan next year's programme; we hope that the statistics and KPIs will allow us to see some trends emerging over the next year or so.
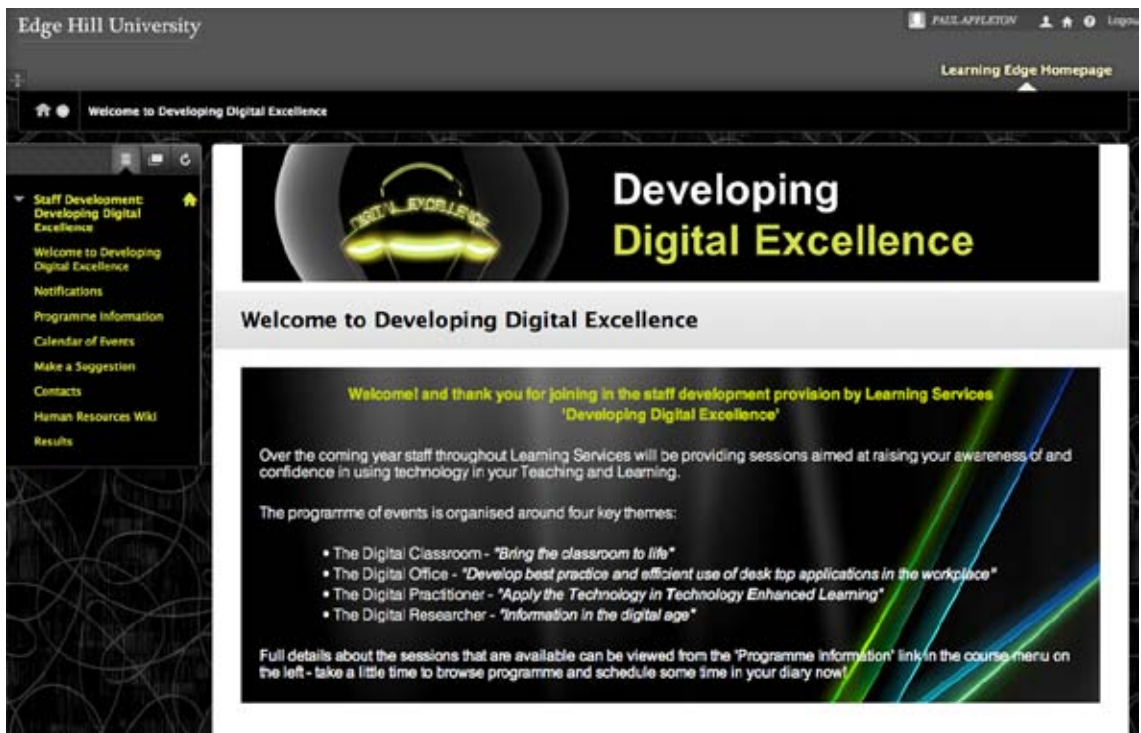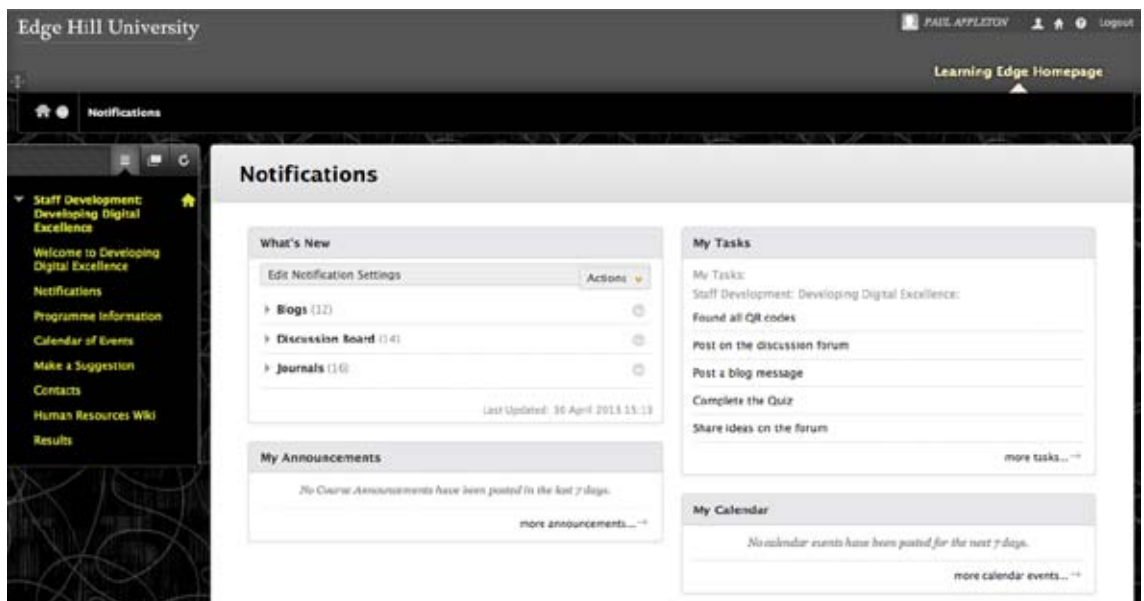

Fig. 1 Home page
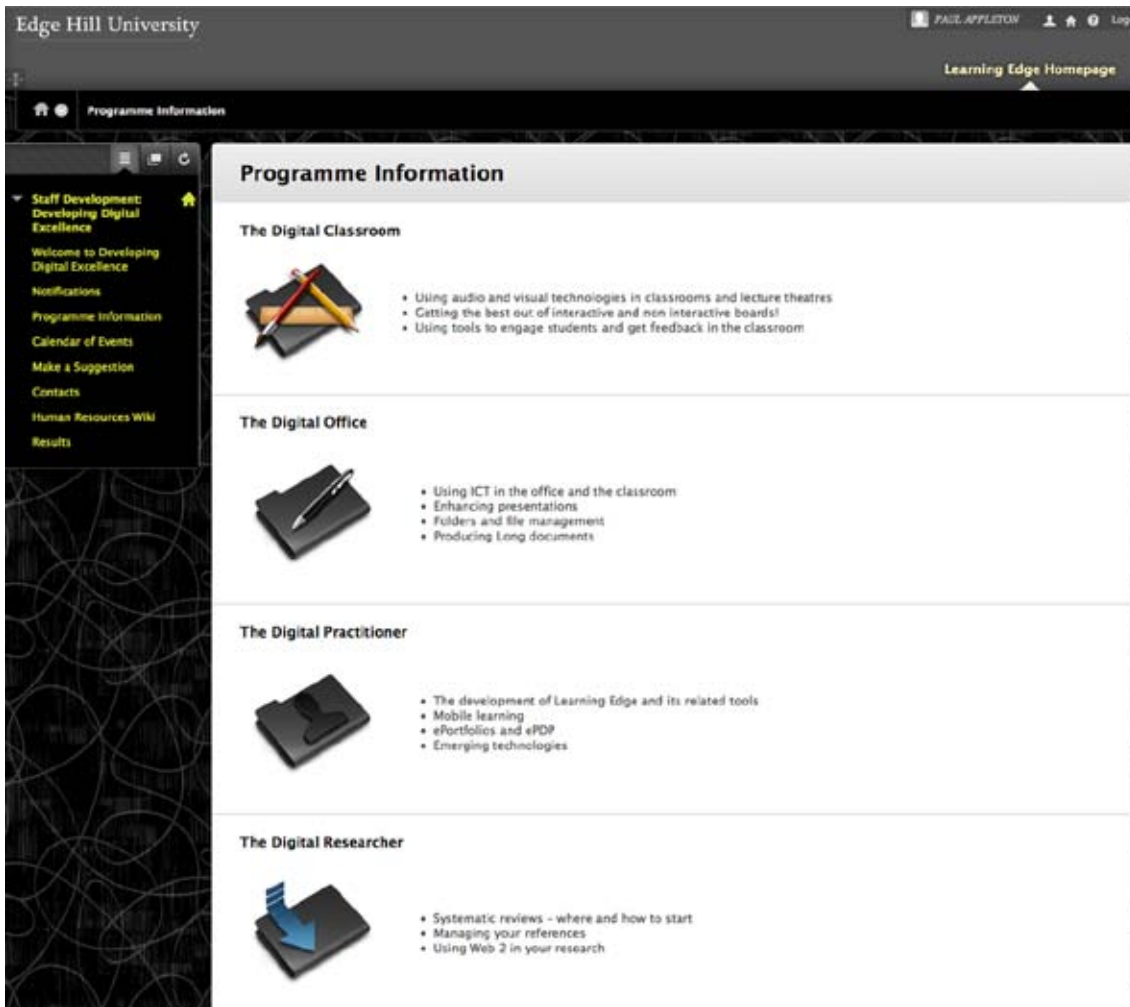

Fig. 2 Course notifications page

Programme Information

The Digital Classroom

- Using audio and visual technologies in classrooms and lecture theatres
- Getting the best out of interactive and non interactive boards!
- Using tools to engage students and get feedback in the classroom

The Digital Office

- Using ICT in the office and the classroom
- Enhancing presentations
- Folders and file management
- Producing Long documents

The Digital Practitioner

- The development of Learning Edge and its related tools
- Mobile learning
- ePortfolios and ePDP
- Emerging technologies

The Digital Researcher

- Systematic reviews – where and how to start
- Managing your references
- Using Web 2 in your research

Fig. 3 Programme information page

Mobile Field Trip

Mobile Field Trip – Session Information

Which apps do you use?
Tell us about which apps you like or have installed

Using media: add a photo to the blog!
Image/photo challenge!

How well do you know EHU?
Answer the following questions about Edge Hill University

Crack the QR code!

Make a Suggestion
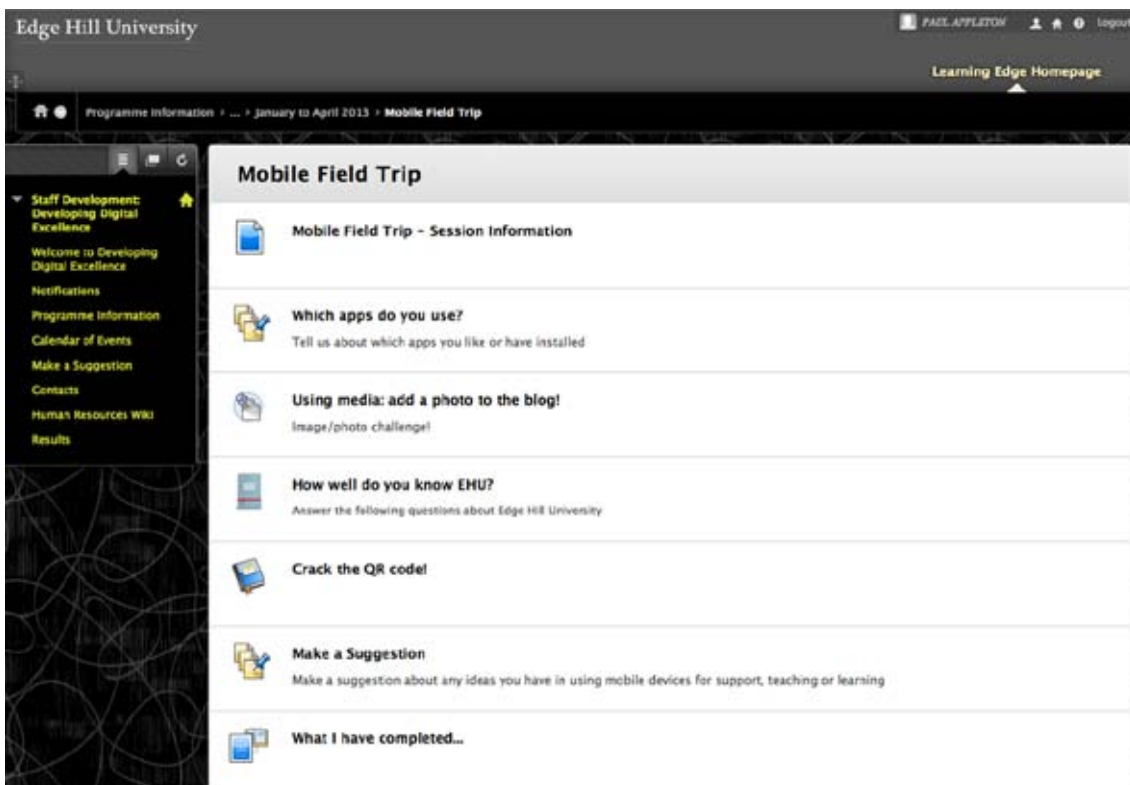Make a suggestion about any ideas you have in using mobile devices for support, teaching or learning

What I have completed...

Fig. 4 Mobile field trip event page