



How the University of Huddersfield has been using D2L's Brightspace platform

The University of Huddersfield is based in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, and was established in 1992. With over 1000 academic staff, the University provides courses for over 18,000 students, and has been recognised as a gold-rated university by the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).

AT A GLANCE

Client: The University of Huddersfield

Students: Over 18,000

Staff: Over 1000 academic staff

Industry: Higher Education

CHALLENGE

- Meet a list of over 2000 requirements collected from across the university
- Enhance the user experience
- Improve teaching and learning
- Use the VLE for more than just a repository—use it to support more innovative pedagogies
- Intuitive for both staff and students
- Developing a partnership
- Wanting something mobile friendly with future requirements built in

SOLUTION

- D2L's Brightspace platform
- Academic staff retreats with Brightspace Support team
- A comprehensive transformation, training and support plan

RESULT

- A transformation from using a VLE as a content repository, to a fully functional learning environment that meets the needs of staff and students both now, and in the future



The Challenge

REQUIREMENTS

The University of Huddersfield decided to review their provider in 2016 after research discovered that alternative VLE solutions could potentially meet their needs better. They wanted to move away from something that felt like a content repository to an active online learning environment where staff and students could engage with content more easily.

They decided to go to tender, and established 17 working groups, who together created a list of over 2000 requirements for the new VLE provider. Time and cost were key factors when considering implementing a new VLE, and so longevity was a key requirement, as they wanted to have the new VLE provider in place for at least the next 10-15 years. “We were looking for a company that we could work in partnership with, someone who would help to drive the project forward and listen to what we had to say and not just accept that what they thought was best—we wanted to build a two way relationship instead”, explains Dr Sue Folley, Academic Development Advisor at University of Huddersfield.

Functionality, usability, and mobile responsiveness were also of vital importance, as they wanted a system that would be easy for both staff and students to use.

“Lots of students use their mobile phones as part of their learning experience. The feedback on our previous VLE was that it was not easy to access on mobiles or tablets, and so it was really important for us to ensure that our new provider would be easy to access in this way.”

*Dr Daniel Belton, University Teaching Fellow,
University of Huddersfield*

THE TENDER PROCESS

Three VLE providers applied to be part of the University’s tender process, and staff conducted a series of usability tests for academic staff and students in order to establish how easy each platform was to use. They used a scoring system to check each contender against their 2000 requirements, where Brightspace came out on top in functionality, and in all but one usability test. “It was an easy decision in the end to be honest,” said Sue Folley, with Daniel Belton adding: “Brightspace offers us a seamlessly integrated active learning environment which we think will work a lot better.”

“We’ve had lots of support from the Brightspace team, and it’s been good to have their expertise on hand.”

Dr Daniel Belton, University Teaching Fellow, University of Huddersfield

The Solution

SMALL SCALE IMPLEMENTATION

The University started working with D2L in August 2017, and launched a small scale implementation for four courses to test functionality and usability, and also make any changes in advance of rolling it out across the whole University.

D2L was able to support this by engaging their expert services team to ensure a successful rollout and change management strategy. They were also able to run, amongst other activities, several best practice sessions for academics, including guidance for the use of Intelligent Agents to free up their time.

Speaking about the implementation outcome, Sue Folley said: “D2L have been through this process with other organisations, and as a result they have their own change management programme which supported us, which was really helpful.

“It all went quite smoothly, D2L has been really good in terms of support—it’s been a real team effort.”

BRINGING BRIGHTSPACE TO LIFE

The full roll out of the Brightspace platform took place in September 2018, and Daniel Belton was really impressed with the responsiveness and support that

D2L has provided. He said: “We’ve had lots of support from the Brightspace team, and it’s been good to have their expertise on hand.” Sue added: “The roll out went as well as we could have hoped, and there’s been lots of work internally between us and D2L, which has worked really well.”

STAFF TRAINING

As part of the Brightspace platform roll out, the University was keen to ensure that staff used the VLE more effectively. Furthermore, as their 1000 staff teach in different ways, they wanted to ensure that their usage was pedagogy-led, and so decided to invite academics to take part in three retreats supported by D2L as part of the change management process.

In advance of each retreat, attendees were asked to submit details of what they wanted to use the VLE for in order to make the sessions as useful as possible. The retreats were supported by a number of experts including Huddersfield’s D2L Customer Success Manager, Sophie McGown. Commenting on the success of the retreats, Daniel Belton said “Sophie put a lot of work and effort into meeting staff needs during the support sessions, which was brilliant.”



The Results

Sharing detailed product knowledge, and supporting participants to overcome development challenges meant Sophie could help guide staff to further enhance their modules. “The staff that attended the retreats have since passed their knowledge back to their colleagues, which has really benefitted the change management process too” concluded Daniel Belton.

IMPLEMENTING CHANGE

To encourage staff to start using the Brightspace platform, 100 power packs were given out to the first members of staff who completed the online training, which Daniel Belton said was a great incentive that tied in well with their change management strategy at the time.

In addition, D2L held a lot of change management webinars for staff, and Sue Folley said she found it really useful that D2L has also been very flexible on how the University has spent their training budget.

“D2L were willing to listen to our needs and do whatever was best for us.”

*Dr Sue Folley, Academic Development Advisor,
University of Huddersfield*

USER FEEDBACK

The University of Huddersfield has not done any formal evaluation on the success of Brightspace by D2L as yet, but Sue Folley and Daniel Belton both agree that the initial response from staff seems to be largely positive.

“It’s intuitive and easy to use and it’s so important for us to have a partnership moving forward. All of the people we’ve worked with at D2L have been instrumental to the success of Brightspace so far.”

*Dr Sue Folley, Academic Development Advisor,
University of Huddersfield*

LOOKING AHEAD

What’s next for the University of Huddersfield and the Brightspace platform? Daniel Belton is keen to run more retreats for staff as they have been so well received, and Sue Folley wants to encourage people to move past just using the basic content, and explore what else the Brightspace platform offers. As Brightspace becomes more embedded, the university is beginning to share their knowledge and experience with other Brightspace customers in the community.