

Advantages of a bespoke online system in supporting industry-based distance learners

This presentation aims to highlight the advantages and disadvantages of a bespoke online learning environment in supporting industry-based part time and short course students on a blended learning masters programme compared to the use of the University's online learning environment. The University's online learning environment is developed to cater for the undergraduate and masters students who are taking a semester long thin modules at the university. The masters program concerned in this work is developed to cater for the industry-based part time students and therefore the modules are delivered as one week-long block-taught modules. The full time students who are attending this masters programme also follow the same modules as their part time cohort. The duration for the full time programme is one year whilst the duration for the part time programme is two and a half years.

A tailor-made online learning environment was used to provide study support effectively for ten years before having to move to the use of the university's online learning environment. With this move, several functions that the bespoke system benefitted were lost and as a result emails has become an essential form of communication to bridge the communication gap.

This presentation is based on the experience gained during and after the transition to the University's online learning environment and discusses the challenges faced to minimise the negative effect on students' learning experience.