Aims and Objectives

Students are required, as a part of their course, to maintain a Standards Profile. This is a document pro-forma developed to allow students to log and reflect upon their activities in planning, preparing and delivering teaching to students while on placement in schools.

An important aspect of this process involves continued oversight from course tutors on the student maintained logs.

This process was initially facilitated by exchange of documents (hard copy or by e-mail). The key aims and objectives were to ease the process of log development by the student and to render this development as transparent as possible to supervising staff (for review and feedback).

A secondary goal was also to expose students to tools they may well need to employ in their own teaching.

Overview

Google Sites was used as the online space for facilitating the student log.

Students were briefed face-to-face on what was expected of them regards the log and, during the same session, introduced to the on-line space itself. The tutoring staff walked the students through ‘pulling down’ their site and also making basic edits as well as initiating the sharing that would allow staff to see their work.

From then on it was up to the students to maintain their log by filling in the tables contained within each of the profile pages (with their profile visible to supervising staff for observation, comment and feedback).
Student Logs and E-Portfolio using Google Sites

Methodology

Academic staff defined the pedagogical aims and approaches for the activity and then approached the E-Learning Development Team to advise on implementation.

The Standards Profile log activity has interestingly been refined over a number of academic years, when first approached the E-Learning Development Team worked with the teaching team to implement a solution based entirely within the VLE. For the most recent cohort (2012/13) the tool previously used was reaching end-of-life and thus another solution needed to be found to support the log activity.

Google Sites proved to be the tool best suited to facilitate the Standards Profile log activity of those readily available to us; particularly as the University had, during the previous year, moved to providing email provision through Google services (which included institutional access to Google Drive/Docs and Sites). This integration of Google provision as part of the supported University services means that there are no authentication issues with the solution (students use their normal University account) and that the default Sites sharing model can be determined within the York domain.

We requested that the default sharing model be private unless the creator of the Google Site decides otherwise rather than that of the original Sites model (of being available to the world by default). This is now the default behaviour across the institution.

A template site was built to reflect the structure of the Standards Profile pro-forma (this site is owned by the teaching staff). This resulted in a ten page Google Site (one home page and nine profile pages). Once a Google Site is designated a template it becomes available to anyone within the York domain to base their own Google Site on. This is how the students are able to start their log with the profile structure already in place.

As mentioned, Google Sites were introduced to students at an early lecture where how to create their site (based on the template) was demonstrated and how to edit there site was covered.

The E-Learning Development Team also developed a written student guide (with illustrative screen-shots) detailing these processes step by step.

Reflections

Use of Google Sites proved very effective in facilitating the activity and provided a solution to all of the key needs of the activity; notably rendering the student logs transparent to all those who needed access (wherever they were assuming they had a computer and internet connection).

From the student perspective in particular, the logs were very easy to access and edit. The previous solution often generated support requests from students with editing problems; Google Sites had no such issues. Another added bonus to this solution is the ease with which, post leaving University, the student can keep their site (by transferring ownership to another Google account).

Feedback from supervising staff on the PGCE module has been very positive:

“Tutors and CA teams have access and I have an overview access to them. This is time efficient and supports our working - due to out travel to school demands etc.”
“It is a big improvement on the previous one and importantly they can take it away with them.”

Feedback from students has been anecdotally very positive (we will be doing a more thorough evaluation this year) leading one member of staff to comment:

"The fact that they did not complain or ask for help, when we first introduced online submission via Google Sites to them, I think is telling as to how easy it is to use and how useful everyone found it."

Transferable lessons learned

Some of these lessons learned have been developed over the years this activity has been taking place on-line (rather than just with the current solution):

- Providing an Initial structure (template) framework for the activity is crucial to the ease of student engagement with the activity. They don’t, for example, have to waste time formatting pages before they begin logging and reflecting on their activities
- A face-to-face introduction to the online activities significantly reduces student anxiety over having to engage with a potentially new-to-them system
- Providing an easy to access guide covering both the activity and using the facilitating system minimises the amount of communication required to simply initiate the task
- Students will find use for the facilitating technology in their own endeavours (beyond that of the activity)

A member of staff also made the following observations: “...there are things to do with layout etc. which I would want to amend for the next time e.g. setting up a general comments section for the whole profile as, with larger numbers of students, the expectation of commenting on every page is onerous. It would also be better if I had requested they "named" their profiles in a specific way to make accessing them simpler”

Next steps

Contact the E-Learning Development Team via email at vle-support@york.ac.uk
Whole School Issues is their VLE site