



Harper Adams University College cultivates a more flexible learning environment with Perception and WebCT

Overhauls eLearning systems with market-leading products

Scenario

As the pressure grows on the farming and wider rural community to deliver more for less and to compete across national borders, so the pressure grows on the higher education sector to provide more forward-thinking, flexible and integrated education to its students in preparation for future employment. As the UK's leading college in the sector (1,700 students), Harper Adams University College is investing significant resources improving its IT systems to provide students easy and 24/7 day access to its developing eLearning environment.

In the last few years the university college's eLearning system has rapidly becoming an integral part of education at Harper Adams and it has been designed to scale quickly and easily. It is already supporting a number of partner colleges around the country as well as internationally through its remote testing facility.

Approach

Harper Adams has developed a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) based around WebCT and Questionmark Perception. This has been used by the college for some time and the two systems have proved that they work well together. Recently the university college has stepped up the pace of its eLearning strategy by looking at new ways of using existing systems and providing additional functionality and accessibility to its academic staff.

Rupert Morris, eLearning Technologist at Harper Adams, comments, "To be sure that we have the best eLearning systems possible, we need to have the best component parts on the market and they need to integrate seamlessly together as well as with the MIS systems. With WebCT and Questionmark Perception we have such a combination and, our eLearning systems are on track to providing the college with the tools necessary to open its doors to a much wider student base and to support the students more effectively. We have invested a significant amount of time and money to establish the VLE and to build into it a level of flexibility and redundancy that ensure the systems will be sufficiently robust for many years to come."

Solution

The systems have been devised to meet the university college's educational needs today and with a close eye on the potential needs of the future.

To that end, much resilience has been in-built, enabling the staff to rely on the availability of the systems at all times and ensuring that they will scale seamlessly as the eLearning strategy grows and develops. Two servers have been allocated to Perception, one to host the application and the other to hold the SQL database that contains the Perception questions.

Commenting on the set-up, Rupert Morris says, "Computer Aided Assessment (CAA) is a powerful tool and should be given serious consideration when planning ahead. The ability to give instant feedback and up-to-the-minute reports on students' progress is incredibly important. We have found Perception to be a very professional product that contains a great number of features, some of which we are yet to uncover, I am sure. It is easy to manage, provides flexible questions and reports and integrates so tightly with our VLE so that they operate as a single entity. We now believe that we have the very best approach to our eLearning systems."

The Results

The eLearning systems are now set up and operating effectively at Harper Adams. The whole concept of eLearning is being promoted strongly within the college and more CAA tests will be developed. These are likely to include interactive testing elements, such as Flash, to introduce a multimedia dimension to the exams.

The last round of exams was completed successfully using the new systems and this has confirmed that eLearning is an integral part of education at Harper Adams.

Kevin Brace, eLearning Development Officer at Harper Adams, concludes, "We have had very positive feedback from the users who have experienced the new tests for both formative and summative exams. They appreciate the immediate feedback they receive from the new systems and the ease of access of the tests. Further training for the academics is very much in the plan moving forward and we are now working to identify departmental eLearning champions to help to spread the word. This strategy will help to improve staff skills and to increase confidence in the university college's systems. We will work closely with Questionmark to take this initiative to the next level."

More information

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