About the Course

The MSc in EBHC aims to enable participants to become innovative and adaptive learners. The course team discussed options and decided a hybrid programme of online and face-to-face learning was the best method of addressing these challenges. After a number of meetings to evaluate the different learning technologies, the new WebLearn system was chosen to support the course, due to its flexibility and ease of use.

The MSc requires satisfactory completion of six taught modules (2 core, 4 elective), each of which takes place over eight weeks, and a research dissertation. The first week of each module is a preparatory week to encourage people to interact online in WebLearn, and to ensure a common starting point. The second intensive week is residential in Oxford and covers most of the theory. The timetable, structure and materials are available on WebLearn, thus providing continuity with the online weeks. The face-to-face contact helps participants get to know and trust each other and facilitates supportive interactions during the following online activities and learning. Peer-supported learning arose spontaneously and the tremendous online activity observed, and positive feedback provided, suggests this structure helped the students to bond well.

WebLearn helps keep momentum going and drives the culture of self-directed, autonomous learning. For example, a Wiki was provided for one exercise. Thereafter students decided to use the wiki to generate a group document identifying problems and potential solutions. WebLearn polls and surveys enable immediate feedback, thus facilitating real-time improvements in the course. The Site Stats tool enables tutors to identify people not participating and proactively support them.
The Course Design

The course was designed using “Learning Activity” design principles. Each activity consists of objectives, pre-knowledge/skills required, resources to support the activity, roles played by participants and tutors, and learning outcomes. The WebLearn sites are designed to:

- Clearly explain how to use the VLE; the module structure; the module aims and learning outcomes; and the nature of the assessment.
- Use the same basic structure for all modules and have a consistent design style across different learning activities within modules including: aims, objectives, tasks and readings.
- Have an intuitive, easily navigable “Resources Corner” with learning support resources, which provides a structured single-access point for all compulsory reading, handouts, videos and supplementary reading materials and tools.

Communication and Collaboration

Although the WebLearn website and course were designed to facilitate communication and collaboration, the extent to which this happened has been exceptional and far exceeded our expectations. The Forum tool is used to build a cohesive group, even before the students come to Oxford. The Chat Room is used by students to help each other with research topics, technical problems, and social activities. Students are asked to reflect on their objectives at the start, during and at the end of each module to encourage them to take control of their own learning. A blog is used later in the course to facilitate this and allow private and shared reflections.

Course Look and Feel, Web Usability

All WebLearn sites have a consistent layout and structure to provide a common ‘look and feel’ and to ensure that key information is presented in a coherent order. The ability to create hidden content and schedule announcements enables preparation of modules and additional content in advance and is useful for tutors to ensure that the sites are well organised, consistent, attractive and easy to use.

Course Evaluation

To measure the effectiveness of the sites, course evaluation was designed as part of course development. The following evaluations were carried out:

- Pre-arrival evaluation
- Ongoing online evaluation and feedback on the discussion forum
- Informal feedback throughout the residential week
- Organised discussion of the course with all students at the close of the residential week
- Anonymous evaluation questionnaire at the end of the residential week.

The Future

The MSc programme is envisioned as part of a dynamic process building a Community of Practice to develop evidence-based health care and support course participants in the future. The WebLearn sites provide an infrastructure for sustaining a Community of Practice of graduates and contributors to the programme in the longer term.

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