End of ITE2 Project Report

A review of the Centre for Teaching and Learning's contribution to the Canvas Enhancements and Inclusive Teaching Enhancements 2 (ITE2) Project, through the provision of four Digital Education Assistants.

Authored by the Digital Education Team, Centre for Teaching and Learning, October 2024

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Report purpose

This report examines the Centre for Teaching and Learning's contribution to the Canvas Enhancements and Inclusive Teaching Enhancements 2 (ITE2) Project, focusing on the role of four Digital Education Assistants. It highlights their key achievements and evaluates the impact of their work on the University's digital education landscape.

Project background

Enhancing the Canvas experience and inclusive teaching at Oxford

As part of the University's Digital Transformation programme, phase 2 of the Canvas Enhancements and Inclusive Teaching Enhancements Project built on the notable successes of phase 1, which helped deliver a consistent and accessible learning environment for Oxford's students and provided further improvements for all those involved with teaching.

What is Canvas?

Canvas, the University's virtual learning environment (VLE), has played a crucial role in the ITE2 Project. You can find out more about Canvas on the Centre for Teaching and Learning website.

What is inclusive teaching?

Inclusive teaching involves recognising and minimising barriers that hinder students' learning and participation while acknowledging that students learn differently. You can find out more about flexible and inclusive teaching on the Centre for Teaching and Learning website.

Project deliverables

The ITE2 Project delivered the following elements:

Canvas foundations

A **Canvas foundations element** focused on improving the architecture, tools and processes used by the team responsible for maintaining the broader VLE ecosystem.

Canvas enhancements

A **Canvas enhancements element** that made targeted improvements within the Canvas VLE for stakeholders, with a review of existing data, a consultation with students and staff, and numerous technical 'back-end' improvements in Canvas to improve the overall user experience.

Inclusive teaching enhancements

An **inclusive teaching enhancements element**, providing Digital Education Assistants (Learning Technologists) to support academic divisions and the recommendation of specific enhancements such as a survey tool, pronouns and name pronunciations in Canvas profiles, and course page design enhancements.

Project benefits

The following benefits from the ITE2 Project for staff and students have been accruing over the lifetime of the project and will continue, significantly improving their digital education experience.

For staff

- Colleagues responsible for managing the Canvas ecosystem spend less time dealing with issues and limitations, and can spend more time creating a better user experience
- Academic divisions benefited from four dedicated Digital Education Assistants who brought focused learning technologist support during the project's duration
- Canvas enhancements provide a better teaching experience
- Academics and administrators have increased knowledge, skills and tools to deliver inclusive teaching practice.

For students

- Canvas enhancements provide a better learning experience
- Students have a more joined up, consistent, inclusive learning experience across all programmes of study
- Students with disabilities and specific needs can participate more equally in teaching and learning.

Rationale: Digital Education Assistants

In consultation with the [Digital Transformation](#) programme and in alignment with the University's [Digital Education Strategy](#), the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) prioritised enhancing the end-user experience. The focus was on ensuring that staff and students could rely on accessible, seamless, usable, flexible, and appropriately feature-rich services to support their day-to-day activities. CTL's key priorities were to:

- Get the basics right
- Provide hands-on support to teams
- Respond to local needs
- Build capacity across the University.

To achieve this, four Digital Education Assistants (DEAs) were recruited to work in academic divisions for 12 months from June 2023 to May 2024.

Activities

As part of the ITE2 Project, CTL aimed to enhance staff and student satisfaction through targeted specialist support collaborating with academic departments. By leveraging digital education tools, with a focus on how they could optimise inclusive and accessible teaching methods, the DEAs supported staff to implement changes that would have the greatest impact on user experience.

The DEAs made inclusion-focused improvements to hundreds of Canvas courses across 35 departments. Their work included:

Redesigning homepages

Making homepages more consistent, attractive, and accessible by consulting with colleagues to help ensure project developments meet user requirements, such as the new Canvas page design.

Transitioning formats

Transitioning courses from PDF calendars to Canvas calendars, allowing visibility in multiple platforms and automatic reminders to be sent to students.

Creating documentation

Developing process documentation to help new and existing staff build local knowledge and get the best from digital education tools, ensuring departmental understanding of Canvas is not lost with staff turnover.

Custom training

Identifying training needs and developing customisable workshops, including:

- Empowering Oxford Educators workshop – developed and facilitated for staff, with customised versions delivered for individual divisions
- Targeted demonstrations and seminars – covering topics such as Canvas enhancements, the Ally accessible content tool, and the Digitally Supported Inclusive Teaching Toolkit).

Tool promotion

Promoting the use of embedded Canvas tools, such as ORLO and Panopto, alongside the Digitally Supported Inclusive Teaching Toolkit, to help teams identify how to make the most of these resources in their own context.

Impact

Interventions such as the examples above contributed to significant progress in four key areas:

1. Streamlining processes
2. Enhancing inclusivity
3. Fostering consistency
4. Empowering educators.

Streamlining processes

The ITE2 Project focused on making operations more efficient, reducing administrative work, and improving teaching processes. The DEAs achieved this by working across academic departments.

Actions	Impacts
Process documentation	106 staff empowered to implement best practices and the creation of 56 process documentation guides.
Course rollover improvements	A more efficient process for administrative staff rolling over 244 courses using the Group Enrolment Tool (GET).
Model tutorial course	A model tutorial course with integrating the signup tool designed to reduce organisational complications.
Dynamic calendar solutions	43 courses transitioned, improving staff scheduling effectively.

Feedback from users

> *"This documentation will be handy for our new hire. We didn't have process documentation before."*

> *"This has been a really useful session for us to understand our own processes better and to think how to improve them."*

Enhancing inclusivity

Working with course teams and the CTL's Digitally Supported Inclusive Teaching Toolkit saw a shift towards equitable and accessible digital learning environments. Tangible milestones include:

Actions	Impact
Embedding ORLO online reading lists	Implementing more accessible reading lists while upholding copyright compliance in 42 courses.
Multimedia content	Revitalising 37 dated pages through H5P tools and custom coding. Delivering engaging multimedia experiences.
Accessibility tools	Ensuring adherence to accessibility standards by deploying Ally and the Digitally Supported Inclusive Teaching Toolkit across nine courses.
Training on inclusive digital tools	Propagating a culture of universal design by conducting targeted training on inclusive digital tools for 84 staff members.

Feedback from users

> *"I can see that it is now more compliant from an accessibility point of view."*

> *"...we've got a better structure now, so that students can find the information they need and that's key..."*

Cultivating consistency

The DEAs championed a unified, coherent digital education experience in a landscape with diverse pedagogical approaches.

Actions	Impact
Consistent course design	Implemented consistent, accessible designs across 178 courses.
Homepage redesigns	Redesigned 165-course homepages for better navigation and content presentation.

Course templates	Crafted 32 bespoke course templates to expedite rollover processes.

Feedback from users

"The new streamlined look is much, much better!"

"As an academic, one thing I really appreciated was that your contribution was very much as consultants, listening attentively to our account of our needs. That has meant we have been able to take on board your suggested improvements (and continue to do so) without having to squeeze our complex courses into a one-size-fits-all format. The effect has been a huge and ongoing improvement in our Canvas pages."

Empowering educators

At the heart of the ITE2 initiative was a solid commitment to equipping Oxford's academic community with the digital skills needed to excel in today's educational environment. Achievements included:

Actions	Impact
'Empowering Oxford Educators' workshop	Upskilled 94 academics and staff through targeted workshops, including a new 'Empowering Oxford Educators' workshop. As a result, academics and administrative staff are better equipped to support the student experience in the Canvas ecosystem.
Onboarding	92 new staff to Canvas were equipped with the skills and tools to maximise their use of digital technologies.
Lecture recordings	Auto-captured lectures enabled in 37 courses, fostering accessibility and student experience.

Feedback from users

"The session helped me think through my next steps, and I feel confident in my familiarity with what's generally available via CTL."

We have worked with the Canvas team to improve our portfolio of Canvas sites. It has helped us to learn about options that are available to us that we don't know about and has spurred us to think creatively so that we can use Canvas in the best interest of the students and to meet their needs. It has definitely built confidence in our team so that they can use more of the Canvas tools effectively."

Conclusion

The Canvas Enhancements and Inclusive Teaching Enhancements 2 (ITE2) Project has successfully impacted Oxford's digital education landscape by streamlining processes, promoting inclusivity, fostering consistency, and empowering educators.

During the project, support tickets to the Digital Education Service Desk dropped by more than 33%, demonstrating the tangible impact of its initiatives in reducing staff and student reliance on help services.

The project also enhanced teaching and learning through the adoption of more consistent structures across hundreds of Canvas courses, benefitting thousands of students.

In addition, it has raised awareness of accessibility tools, encouraged self-evaluation of digital resources, and delivered sustainable improvements that will continue to support staff and students long after the project's conclusion.

The collaboration between the ITE2 initiative and CTL, through the work of the Digital Education Assistants, has contributed to the implementation of the University's Digital Education Strategy across divisions and departments.

It has fostered inclusive teaching practices, supported technological innovation in learning, and built stronger partnerships with departments. This work has not only enabled ongoing collaboration but also delivered sustainable improvements that benefit staff and students alike.

Feedback from users

> *"The ITE project has given us the time to reconnect with course teams' Canvas provision, and it's been great to have a competent pair of hands to improve both the student, and staff, experience of digital education in MedSci."*

> *"...the time and sort of focus that you have been able to put into it this year, we wouldn't have made anywhere near the progress and improvement that we have. And with that we wouldn't have developed that whole positive feeling of engaging with Canvas now..."*