

INTO University Partnerships

Delivering rewarding
learning experiences for
international students

INTO University Partnerships is an independent education organisation that connects students seeking quality international education with leading universities worldwide.

Since its inception in 2005, INTO has pioneered innovation in international education and created groundbreaking partnerships with 30 universities in the US and UK. It has so far helped more than 130,000 students from 190 countries realise their dream of achieving a degree from a world-class university. INTO also equips students to get a head start in building a career by offering exceptional academic and employability skills programmes.

INTO 
the global education partners

AT A GLANCE

Client: INTO University Partnerships
Learners: 3,000+
Industry: Higher Education
Website: www.intoglobal.com

Platform/Features:

- D2L Brightspace platform
- Quizzes, discussions, notifications
- Student support services

Interviewees:

- **Sarah Appleton**, UK Systems Manager
- **Bernie Thompson**, VP UK IT
- **Mike Atkins**, VP Digital Systems
- **Grainne O'Neil**, Director Learning Solutions

Highlights:

- Rapid transition online to maintain learning continuity during the pandemic
- Four online courses were developed in under eight weeks
- Scalable solution, available across regions
- A strong working partnership that drove results.

Challenge

To rapidly implement online learning internationally

Prior to the summer of 2020, INTO offered predominately face to face programmes with some blended learning delivered through its own in-house virtual learning environment. When the COVID-19 pandemic made in-person teaching impossible, INTO focused on providing seamless online learning. Its first priority was to resolve any issues that would detract from the online experience.

“The digital solution we had in place wasn’t core to our learning offering, so it wasn’t designed for high-volume, global traffic,” says Mike Atkins, VP Digital Systems at INTO. “As our students are all over the world, we needed a reliable, centralised system that could be accessed from anywhere and that would scale to accommodate high volumes.”

INTO instigated a plan for supporting thousands of online learners around the globe. The team recognised that a learning management system (LMS) offered opportunities for enhancing learning. However, as learning specialists, INTO was also aware that transitioning online would be a culture change for tutors and students. The team knew all platform users would need support to hone digital skills and adapt from a synchronous to asynchronous teaching and learning model.

“This would be a fundamental shift that would have to be managed in the right way,” explains Sarah Appleton, UK Systems Manager at INTO. “And we didn’t have much time.”

INTO’s educators had switched to homeworking at short notice and therefore had limited access to equipment. Likewise, students around the globe, set to embark on summer courses that would prepare them for the autumn start of their university life, had varied levels of access to digital tools. Teaching staff across INTO’s university partners would need to upskill in time to develop and deliver courses online for when teaching began. Added to this, the LMS would have to enrol students, facilitate course administration and support assessments.

“Prior to COVID, the **learning management systems were an adjunct and a **tool** that we were using as part of the teaching; we now want them to be central to teaching going forward.”**

Bernie Thompson
VP UK IT, INTO University Partnerships

Solution

Online learning that is feature-rich

INTO had already embarked upon a selection process to find a new out-of-the-box LMS that would support thousands of users worldwide and be intuitive to use. This process had revealed D2L's feature-rich Brightspace platform to be the best fit. Now, the teams had to work together to implement the solution and equip teaching staff within a matter of weeks.

“Brightspace already ticked the boxes for scalability, reliability and accessibility. Now, we were asking to accelerate implementation,” says Mike. “The team was very responsive, working with us to understand the experience of students accessing the platform from all parts of the world and putting us in touch with other customers who had knowledge of this area too. It was reassuring to see the team's commitment to ensuring every student has the same quality experience.”

From an initial engagement with D2L in March 2020, four online courses were developed by June—an implementation of under eight weeks. Around 1,000 students participated in the summer courses for English language learning, with a further cohort following soon after in September.

“As the Brightspace platform is SCORM compliant, it gives us the flexibility in how we author, build and manage our content. It allows us to offer our students high quality interactive online content and offers additional means to track student performance integrated into Brightspace's platform data tracking,” says Grainne O'Neil, INTO's Director for Learning Solutions.

Running alongside the technical and administrative implementation was a significant programme of training and support for educators and staff. Four D2L-led sessions prepared INTO's learning solutions team who then trained educators on preparing and delivering courses through D2L Brightspace.

On the lead up to delivery and for the month thereafter, Learning Solutions delivered 77 training sessions to 1200 educators. “We continue to run our monthly training programmes to upskill our educators and staff on using technology to deliver our programmes,” says Grainne.



“We worked collaboratively with our university partners on an upskilling approach,” says Sarah. “Initially addressing key priorities such as how to teach an online class, how to check student engagement, how to add content. Then we built on that knowledge.”

Live, as well as asynchronous, classes were subsequently taught through the platform which also housed content for students to pre-read in preparation for the taught sessions. Quizzes and discussions were also used to check student understanding and promote collaboration and engagement. All the while, notifications kept students on track.

“Students found deadline reminders one of the most useful features,” adds Sarah. “We use as many features as we can to enable students to engage more with their studies and we do lots of training on different techniques.”

INTO expanded its expertise by employing learning technologists to work alongside staff to ensure an excellent grounding in the pedagogy of online teaching and learning. A centralised support system, resembling a virtual reception, was also developed by INTO and linked to the platform to maximise levels of student support. This housed a knowledge base on the functions and services of a university and provided access to a support worker and live chat service where students could raise issues and get help.

“D2L partnered with us to ensure we got the **best** out of the **platform**. We achieved a huge upskilling in digital literacy in a really short time.”

Bernie Thompson
VP UK IT, INTO University Partnerships



Result

Uninterrupted learning and satisfied students

From a standing start, INTO succeeded in delivering fully online courses from the summer of 2020 so that international students enjoyed more uninterrupted learning during the pandemic. INTO's 2021 Annual Student Experience Survey—which covered teaching through a range of virtual learning environments, including D2L Brightspace—returned a 94% overall satisfaction rating.

“Circumstances accelerated our processes for digital learning,” says Mike. “And the outcome exceeded our expectations.”

Through the platform, students and staff enjoyed better access to learning tools and content, from wherever they were. With centralised administration, maintaining and accessing records was straightforward and comprehensive. The digital upskilling programme was a huge success with tutors and support staff prepared to deliver courses through the new platform in time for the start of teaching. Despite the tight timescales, INTO succeeded in providing not only academic content for students but also support services to contribute to positive wellbeing.

Looking ahead, the team intends to capitalise on the learning analytics functionality within the platform to identify and measure student engagement indicators and more.

“Blended learning is here to stay. We expect to innovate more and introduce additional ways of interacting with students through the platform,” concludes Sarah. “Throughout, D2L has provided options and made suggestions. It helps us to know we have people there we can go to.”

INTO rapidly adapted to meet the need for digital tuition in 2020, ensuring students had better access to learning. Through its successful partnership with D2L, it rose to the challenge to deliver feature-rich online courses that students could access. The D2L Brightspace platform will form a part of INTO's blend of in-person and online learning once classroom teaching is reintroduced.

