

Legal Regulation & Education: Doing the Right Thing?

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Trying to Do the Right Thing...! e-Learning and Experiential Learning for a Changing Legal World

"In most places where new technologies are being used in education today, the technologies are used simply to reinforce outmoded approaches to learning."

The legal profession is currently in a period of flux. The proposed growth in Alternative Business Structures and the currently debated changes to qualification routes to the profession, exhibit the greatest challenges facing undergraduate legal education. Although the LETR did not have the far-reaching consequences for undergraduate legal education that was first envisaged, it has encouraged educators and educational theorists to consider the delivery and design of legal curricular. This has inevitably prompted renewed discussions around the incorporation of experiential learning, embedding employability skills in the undergraduate curriculum and the assimilation of technology in skills delivery. However, the concern amongst educational technologists is technology is being incorporated to merely update traditional, often out-dated approaches to learning and teaching in higher education.

During my time at the University of Exeter Law School, I was personally responsible for the design, development, implementation and management of the Excel@Law transition project. This was an innovative educational project that used technology to prepare students for university and to aid the transition to studying law. Transition has been an important issue in recent years, and this project sought to enhance the student experience by giving students who had selected Exeter Law School as their firm choice through UCAS the opportunity to enhance their study skills pre-enrolment and prepare for university life. In 2012, this project (stage 1) created a blog portal that students holding a place at Exeter could access from the 14/8/13 (A-level results day). The blog included a multimedia platform, which included written, audio and visual content that was released every 2 days between results day and arrivals weekend. In 2013, this project built upon this core content and introduced tasks that students were expected to complete to prepare them further for the challenges of the first year curriculum. Stage 2 focused more directly on learning skills that related to the study of law. Furthermore, the project also expanded its current sources to include focus pieces on the city, including its local business, amenities and attractions, to better prepare home, EU and international students on coming to Exeter.

In my role as e-learning and digital resource coordinator at the University of Exeter Law School, I designed and implemented the VBR (Virtual Board Room) as a companion to the VLF (Virtual Law Firm) project. The 'virtual boardroom' is an online collaborative environment that gives students the opportunity to work together and prepare caseload work by researching tasks using specific legal resources and the internet. This ELGG

environment allows each of our virtual law firms to collaborate online. I designed this online collaborative space as a bridge between social media and collaborative cloud-based software. All the features that were included were related to employability and collaborative working, a feature of modern employment.

This paper will explore the realities facing legal education and advocate the importance of the incorporation of IT skills, virtual environments and technologically enhanced training programmes to develop legal skills and technological proficiencies amongst our students. This research will draw upon my previous experience of conceptualising, developing and incorporating e-learning and technology-enhanced programmes to explore how technology can align with practical 'real-world' employability skills. This paper will examine and advocate the importance of developing e-learning tools using a sandbox approach, to ensure that the aims and objectives of legal courses are constructively aligned to the proposed tool, interface or platform being developed to directly address the issues highlighted by Resnick in 2002. Finally, this paper will demonstrate how in the changing legal world, legal education needs to actively embrace experiential learning facilitated, even led, by more widespread engagement with technology and custom-designed e-learning tools. Our students are the future of the legal profession, and to ensure that they are prepared for this uncertain future, legal education needs to invest in designing innovative and original curricular, embedding skills at the heart of programmes and reflecting modern legal (and business) practice through technological engagement.