

ASSOCIATION OF LAW TEACHERS CONFERENCE 2016-11-09

Promoting Collaboration

Session Title	The Research Informed Teaching Project at Staffordshire University 2013-2016: Enhancing Students' Skills Development in Contract Law through an Online Simulation (MLX)
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Lead Project Researcher*	Judith Tillson
Conference Presenters	Keith Puttick, Christine Harrison, Stephen Gomez
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MLX Team & Co-Presenters at ALT, Newcastle	<u>University/Organisation</u>
1. Judith Tillson	Staffordshire University Law School
2. Christine Harrison	Staffordshire University, ADU
3. Kerry George	Pearson Education
4. Stephen Gomez	Pearson Education
5. Keith Puttick	Staffordshire University Law School
RiT Project Members (SU): Christine Harrison Keith Puttick Judith Tillson	Staffordshire University Staffordshire University Staffordshire University

Description of Session (20th March 2016)
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Paper

In this session, members of the RiT project team and colleagues from Pearson Education who have been supporting the project presented the results of a collaborative study, led by Judith Tillson, on the use of a new digital, online learning resource called MyLegalExperience (MLX). The project has been assisting student learning in Contract Law – a LLB module which Judith leads at Staffordshire University. The presentation started with some background information, describing the challenges faced when using traditional teaching methods to apply Contract Law to practical advice for clients and then explain the use of an online system to address these challenges. Emphasis was placed on how collaboration between tutor, student and content provider can be facilitated through technology. Time was allocated for a demonstration and questions from delegates.

Conference Stream. The paper fell within Stream 4: Facilitating Collaboration through Technology

Abstract (500 words):

The RiT project at Staffordshire University has been interested in a range of issues since it started in 2013, including the support that Law students get from a variety of on-line systems and services which support their research, teaching, and learning, and the application of knowledge. Previous presentations at ALT conferences, including those at Nottingham and Cardiff, have been concerned with aspects of the project relating to the use of on-line systems like to support the development and deployment of research and research-related skills.

This aspect of the project (the MLX project) focuses on the problems students can have with putting their knowledge into practice, for instance when advising clients about legal matters. As Judith, the project leader, has observed, students are requesting more opportunities to practice and to obtain more feedback. They are also looking for more individual, personalised comments from tutors. With the increase in student numbers, all these requirements have an impact on tutor workload. In this context, the research wanted to assess how new internet technologies have the potential for addressing these issues, especially as lecturers either do not have the time, or web skills, to produce sophisticated online systems at a standard expected by their students who are used to professional software on the internet.

Judith and other members of the team, notably Christine Harrison, have teamed up with Pearson, the education publishers, to trial MLX. The system provides an online simulation designed to support students' engagement and skills development in Contract Law across 6 topics: but in this trial only two topics were used.

In each topic, students played a legal advisory role, and completed practical tasks in response to the issues raised by a fictional client. Each topic consisted of four scaffolded activities that built up in complexity as students worked through them. The activities were:

1. Issue spotting - students answer a series of self-assessed MCQs (multiple choice questions) to identify the legal issues and legal principles from the facts related to Contract Law.
2. Analysing the Law - students fill in the blanks to identify the legal issues and legal principles from

the facts.

3. Applying legal advice – this involves a practical task designed to put knowledge into practice by students uploading a piece of work which is then marked by the lecturer who gives feedback to be used to feed forward as assessment for learning as the basis of the fourth activity below.

4. Reflection- model answer and reflective MCQs to compare work completed in activity 3 to the model answer to facilitate self-assessment as a link to self-organised learning.

Judith and project team members were able to explore the effectiveness or efficacy of MLX in supporting learning through a simulation in the manner described above. Though using a specific learning resource (i.e. MLX) in the study, it is intended that the research will inform and establish a pedagogy that could be applied in other contexts.

The project has been run in a live module in 2015-16 academic year, and used a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to assess students' attitudes and perspectives as well as data analytics to measure student engagement and performance - both in MLX and in summative module assignments. Judith and other team members have also been using an innovative Twitter approach to charting student attitudes throughout their usage of MLX.

Project Findings. The project is on-going, and the ALT conference session was an opportunity to share preliminary findings as at March 2016. Project findings and later work undertaken by Judith and other collaborating members of the team and Pearson will also, it is hoped, feature in an article in *The Law Teacher* later in 2017-18, and in other outputs.