

TEL Us More about Biosciences

In 2009 the Technology Enhanced Learning Team ran the 'TEL Us More' competition for innovative use of technology in modules. Each Faculty nominated its chosen examples of best practice, and students throughout the University were also asked to nominate the X-stream (Virtual Learning Environment) module they had found most helpful in their studies. Here Stephen Atkinson of the Faculty of Health reflects on his winning student-nominated module: Introduction to Biosciences.

What boxes does this module's website tick? It contains the usual sort of boring but necessary information about the module; it is a reservoir of resources – lecture presentations, links to useful sites, some interactive stuff. The usual assessment suspects are present, in formative and summative garb.

The problem then becomes one of preventing students from checking out the site in week 1, then doing nothing until pre-exam panic sets in some months later. Since this is a first-year module, a degree of prescription in order to encourage the development of good habits is allowed. So, formative assessments will be done, because only through completing formative assessments successfully will the next basket of goodies be unlocked. Each basket of goodies contains the previous two weeks of support materials and access to further formative and summative tests. The formative tests get instant feedback, the summative tests use confidence-based marking, encouraging students to question their understanding (more tolerated than liked, I found). The module proceeds in a succession of unlocked two-week blocks over the year.

The consequences are that student engagement with the site is 100%; students revisit lecture notes within days of a lecture and get instant feedback on their understanding. Therefore, exam revision when it happens really is *revisere* (revisiting or looking at again). Monitoring is straightforward, by site visits and performance in assessments. Student feedback on the structure was good and exam performance was substantially improved.

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