Pearson

Using Pearson digital resources to achieve teaching and learning goals

Implementation best practices from 28 UK and Ireland educator experiences

Pearson

About Pearson digital learning resources

We offer a range of online learning platforms that educators use to support delivery of their Higher Education courses.

MyLab and Mastering is the world's leading collection of online homework, tutorial and assessment products. The platforms react to how students are performing, offering data-driven guidance that helps them better absorb course material and understand difficult concepts. They're available for an array of subjects from maths, statistics, science and engineering to accounting and finance.

Revel provides an interactive learning environment that allows students to read, practise and study in one continuous experience. Available for a range of courses including law, human resource management, psychology and research methods.

Key findings

- The most popular goals for using a Pearson digital resource relate to improving **engagement, access, confidence**, and to **providing assessment**.
- The three most common implementation strategies for the first year of use were:
    - Create assessments for **credit**
    - Closely **integrate** into teaching structure
    - Regularly **communicate** expectations to students
- Of those who fully achieved or more their initial goals, **80% had created assignments for credit.**
- In the second year of resource usage, two different implementation strategies appear in the top 3:
    - Explore ways to use the resource to **progressively build** on student knowledge or skills
    - Used the **gradebook to feedback and support students** with their learning
- There are challenges and limitations to approaching your first year of usage as a 'trial' year.

Introduction

When introducing a new digital resource to support students on your module, the **implementation*** of the resource is the most crucial factor for success. From a 2020 review paper[1] of several educator studies, we found that the most successful implementation strategy was to **integrate** the resource *fully* into your assessment approach and your module structure so that it can enable the student learning experiences you're aiming for.

In summer 2021, we ran a survey along with some in-depth interviews **to further test those review paper findings**, and here we share what we learned.

Overview of the research

Our goal was to test our earlier findings on which implementation strategies are most likely to lead to the achievement of teaching and learning goals. We wanted to capture and explore the experiences of a wide range of educators who had used the resource for one or two years. We hoped to better understand what factors influenced the successful use our digital resources from the outset.

Methodology

The survey was sent to 76 current users of Pearson digital resources (MyLab, Mastering and Revel) who were either in their first or second year of using the resource. There were 28 survey responses. Of those, 17 educators took part in a follow-up interview to discuss their experience in more detail.

The responses were split as follows:

Survey

- Year 1: 18
- Year 2: 10

Interviews

- Year 1: 8
- Year 2: 9

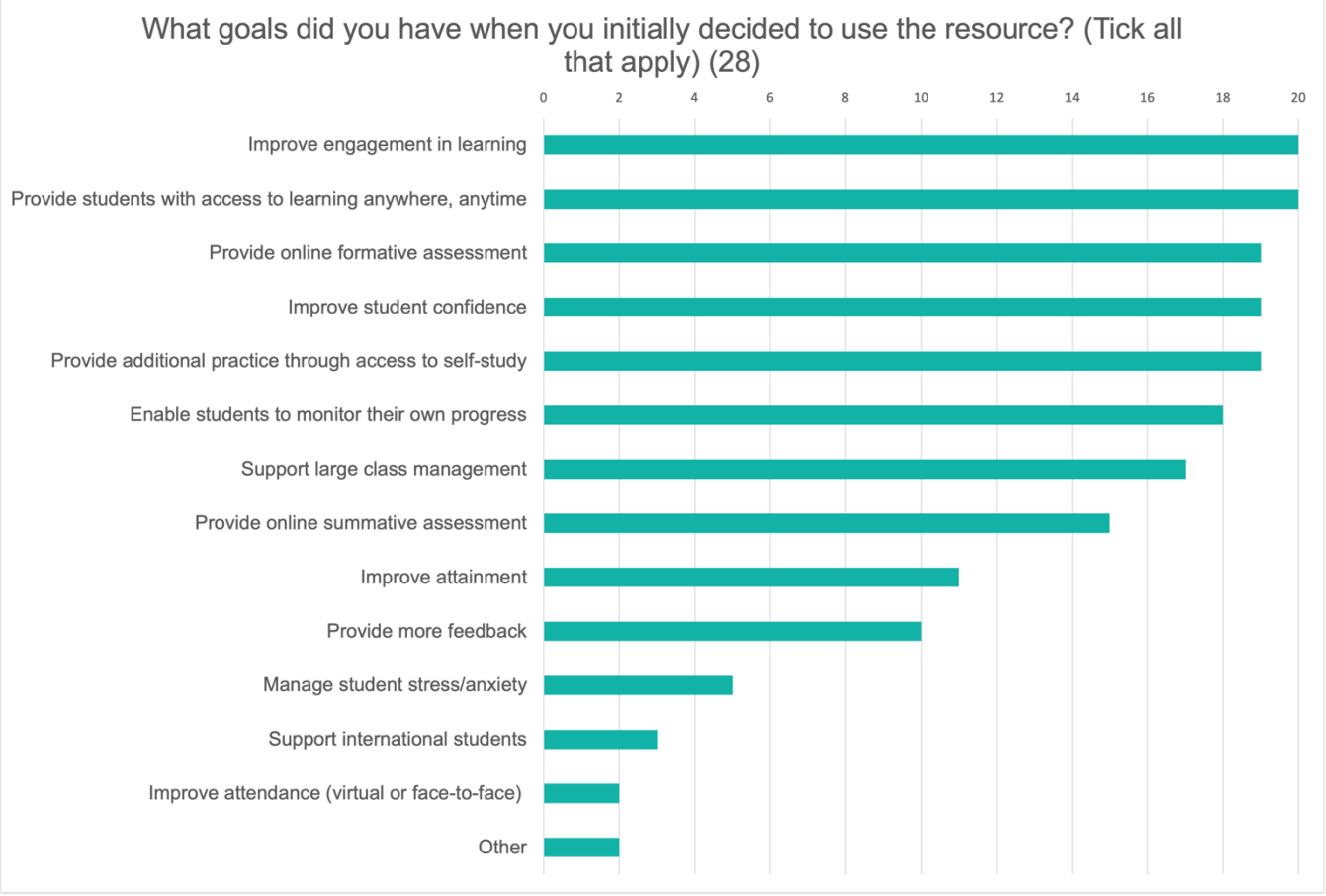
*In this paper '*implementation*' refers to all the ways in which you use the digital resource and introduce it into your module, provide your students with access and make it part of your teaching. Later, we use the word '*integration*' which we define as building the resource into your module structure, creating a smooth, singular experience for students. At this point the resource is an intrinsic part of the teaching and learning experience.

Setting and achieving your goals

> *It's important to know for what reason you want to use MyLab – it helps you set your right expectations and then you can think how to use it accordingly. Many people want to use an online platform but don't have an idea of their goals.*

Knowing your goals at the start is our key recommendation: to have clarity about what you hope will happen when you use the digital resource. Articulate your module ambitions as goals that you think can be achieved with the effective use of the resource – this will motivate you to implement the digital resource in the best way to achieve those goals. And don't forget that we have a team of people to support you, who know in detail how our resources work and have years of experience helping educators like you achieve their goals.

The most common goals can be seen in the chart below. The top 5 relate to **improving engagement, access, confidence,** and to **providing assessment**.



It is worth noting that people *don't* always achieve their goals, or at least not all of them. While **39%** of our respondents had **fully or more than** achieved their goals, a majority (**57%**) said they had only **partially achieved** them, and one person felt they had not achieved their goals at all.

We therefore acknowledge that setting and achieving your goals is not necessarily straightforward – most people would benefit from more additional clarity on how to achieve those goals through implementation strategies. This is how your Pearson Training Consultant can help you.

Successful implementation strategies

As mentioned, it's not a given that goals will be achieved simply by using a digital resource.

If you've taken the time to set goals, the second section of time you need to invest is in deciding upon the implementation strategy that will help you achieve those goals.

We saw from our survey findings that it really does matter what implementation strategies you use. Of those who fully achieved or more than achieved their goals, **80% had created assignments for credit.** Within that 80%, 8 out of 9 also said they had **regularly communicated** with students and 7 out of 9 had **closely integrated** it into their teaching structure. We propose that implementing these **three guiding principles** may be the best route to success:

Digital resource implementation guiding principles

- Credit
- Integrate
- Communicate

For the Year 2 respondents, most (7 out of 12) of the new implementation strategies they introduced in their second year of use were adaptations of existing implementations, building on the approach of Year 1 and they also tied into two of our three guiding principles around credit and integration:

- **increase the number** of assessments
- change the **amount of credit**
- introduce **new types of assessments**.

These three crucial tactics also came through in many of the interview participants' responses to the question: '*What advice would you give someone who is just about to use this digital resource?*'

> *The perfect way is to integrate it into the summative assessment. I think that's a very good way of encouraging them.*

> *Highlight the benefits to the students as much as you can, the value-add and the importance to the module.*

> *We gave them a timetable. Multiple email reminders – "test coming, make sure you do it on time".*

> *I was emailing "I noticed that X% of you have not done those quizzes, you need them for your end of module exam."*

> *I sent them a weekly agenda of teaching structure. "X, Y, Z – the readings are at this point". The overwhelming feedback on that is positive.*

> *...having it tied in with a bunch of other things in a package [helped] – it wasn't seen as an isolated thing. They can't do the practicals without knowing the maths.*

> *I always create links through Canvas – direct link to the test.*

> *Communicating to the students from the very beginning and integrating it as part of the assessment – a small percentage to encourage students. That's the best way to encourage students to actually go and work on it.*

> *It's directly linked from within the VLE, direct to each practice question set and end of week quiz. Structure and integration were the biggest transformation. We've seen some improvement in scores.*

When we asked Year 1 users '*If you could implement just ONE thing next year, what would you choose and why?*', two respondents who chose one of our three guiding principles, explained their rationale:

> *Regularly communicate expectations for using the digital resource to my students – because I felt that the students did not understand the benefits that this programme offered.*

> *Integrate more closely into teaching structure to enhance student learning experience.*

Tips for avoiding a 'wasted year'

Sometimes – for example, when a decision to use a digital resource has been taken late – you may think that you simply don't have time to implement as fully as you would like. However, we would highlight that any time not taken in Year 1, will be needed in Year 2 anyway, so if you *can* invest the time upfront, you have the chance to see a positive impact on your module sooner and to support an additional cohort of students.

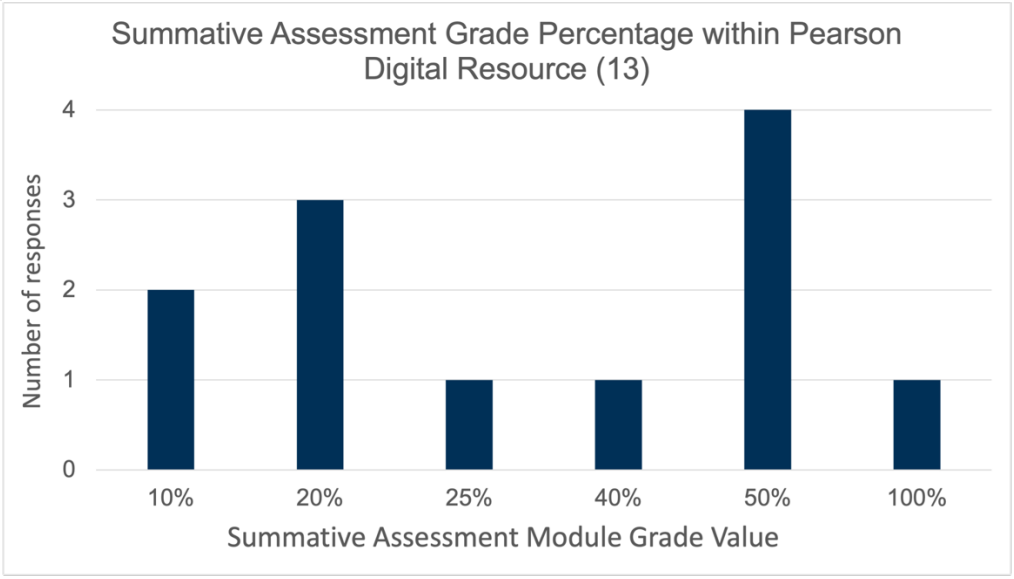
So, while we wouldn't recommend a trial year, we observe that this is sometimes a choice educators make (often due to time constraints). In our survey two respondents who said they *didn't* fully achieve their goals had considered Year 1 a 'trial year' and said that next year they would **give credit** and **implement more comprehensively** (integrate) – interesting to note that they subsequently recognised the importance of following two of our three guiding principles.

The need to make as effective use of the digital resource as possible is especially relevant if you've used departmental budget to purchase access for your students, as you will need to demonstrate a return on that investment. So, based on the experience and recommendations of fellow academics, we hope you'll feel confident to take the leap (with the support of our training team of course) and fully implement the digital resource in your module from Year 1, starting with the three guiding principles – Credit, Integrate, Communicate.

Typical online assessment structures

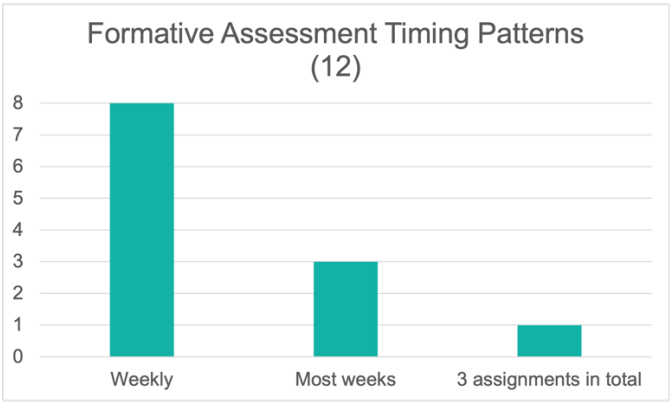
We were interested to know whether there was a typical assessment set up from which new users of our digital resources could take inspiration. As one may expect, every module is unique so while we see slight trends, our advice is that your assessment structure depends on what you're looking to achieve.

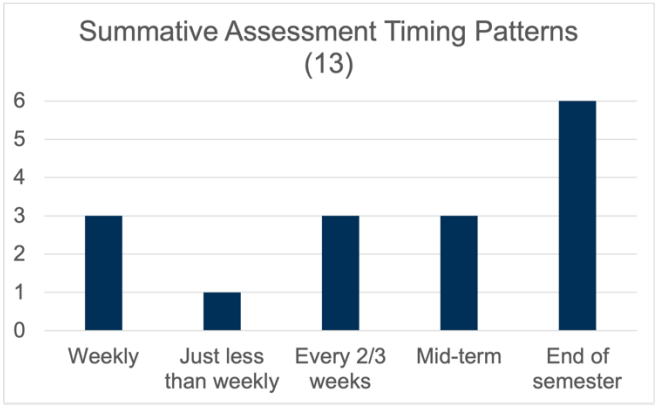
From our interview participants, 13 were assigning online assessment as a contribution towards module credit. Marks given for summative assessment within the digital resource range from 10–100%, with 50% and 20% being the most popular weightings.



Online **formative** assessments tend to be set **weekly**, with **summative** assessments slightly more likely to be at the **end of the semester**.

The charts below show that there is a huge range of how educators are setting assessment across the semester – however, it is worth considering how it can be used more consistently throughout the semester to check progress and motivate students.





(NB: The total number of responses in the chart on the right is 16 because 3 of the 13 participants set summative assessments with more than one timing i.e., weekly *plus* a mid-term test)

A reflection on one educator's experience

We wanted to see what could be learned by looking specifically at the one respondent who felt they *hadn't achieved* their goals at all in their first year using the digital resource (MyLab).

Their initial goals were:

- Improve student confidence
- Provide additional practice through access to self-study
- Provide students with access to learning anywhere, anytime

They recognised a ***lack* of implementation** as some of the reasons for not achieving their goals:

- Did not have time to implement the product as I intended
- I didn't integrate it into my module structure
- Student engagement with digital resource was low

The one strategy they had implemented was to use the gradebook to feedback and support students with their learning. (In the MyLab gradebook you can check students' activity in the independent learning area of the resource, even if you've not set any assessments.)

Their advice to a fellow academic about to use MyLab would be to ***"Integrate it in summative assessment".***

Getting budget?

For 12 out of 17 interview participants, their university was purchasing the digital resource on behalf of students. We asked these people about the process of getting budget and what circumstances had the most positive impact on how easy it is to get that budget approved.

While there wasn't a distinct leading theme around how they got budget approval, these three factors were mentioned most often:

- **Higher student numbers** supported getting budget approval
- They had **demonstrated positive outcomes** to make a case to *continue* getting the budget
- **Reduction of other resources** that would have taken budget such as Teaching Assistants and laboratory consumable items helped their case

We can't ignore the year in which this research was conducted (2021) and note that 3 participants felt that **the pandemic made getting the budget easier**. This was the case even if their decision to use the resource was *not* initially influenced by COVID-19.

Additional advice for new users

Following on from our earlier point that the more time you can put in to set your goals and make informed choices about your implementation strategies, the more chance your students engage and benefit, here are some more tips from fellow educators that support this approach. Fundamentally, they advise taking the time up-front to really explore what the resource can do and get it all set it up for your students before the start of your module.

> *Consider yourself as a student and see how you feel as a student. Go through the questions and see what the platform offers to you.*

> *Play with it. I would think about how to structure the chapters – I've probably not made the most use of the tasks and questions within the chapters.*

> *Invest more time at the beginning of using the system. Use it before the actual use with the students.*

> *Do it! Don't be afraid of it. Ask for help and support from Pearson. Try to engage the students with it. We tried to do it in a kind of light-hearted way. We tried to make it as much fun as you could a bunch of calculations.*

> *If you have time, have everything set up for students to see all the quizzes at the start.*

> *The more I use it the more confident I am, the more able I am to use more features.*

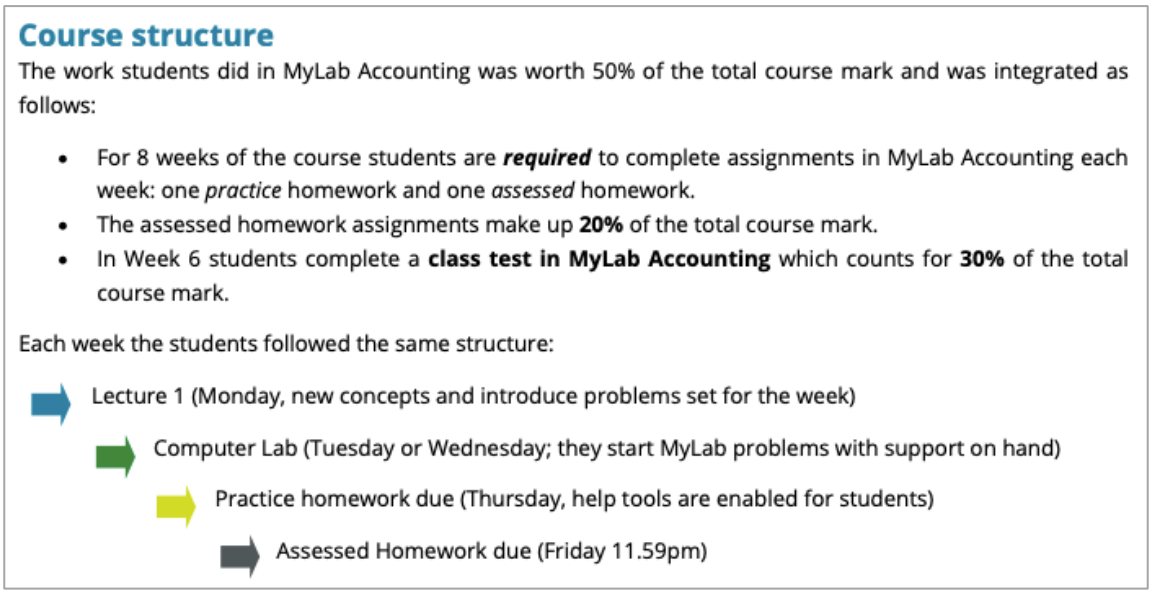
Conclusion

In this paper we've outlined that to get the most out of a digital resource and have the best chance of achieving your teaching and learning goals you need to have clarity on those goals and to spend time implementing it as effectively as possible. If you don't feel that you have enough time, we still strongly advocate using your time well in Year 1, so you don't have to do it all over again in Year 2. Make sure you're seeking out the training that's on offer and don't forget that our Training Consultants can help you every step of the way, from goal setting and implementation to reporting and assessing the impact.

In summary our top tips are:

- consider your goals
- set your assessment structure
- fully explore the resource, the questions and the features available
- use the three guiding principles – Credit, Integrate, Communicate.

Taking that **assessment structure** point, we wanted to share an example of how formative and summative assessments can be integrated holistically within a module, with a structure that provides clarity for students. In doing this the educator has found they are *more than* achieving the goals they set for their module.



Course structure

The work students did in MyLab Accounting was worth 50% of the total course mark and was integrated as follows:

- For 8 weeks of the course students are ***required*** to complete assignments in MyLab Accounting each week: one *practice* homework and one *assessed* homework.
- The assessed homework assignments make up **20%** of the total course mark.
- In Week 6 students complete a **class test in MyLab Accounting** which counts for **30%** of the total course mark.

Each week the students followed the same structure:

Lecture 1 (Monday, new concepts and introduce problems set for the week)

Computer Lab (Tuesday or Wednesday; they start MyLab problems with support on hand)

Practice homework due (Thursday, help tools are enabled for students)

Assessed Homework due (Friday 11.59pm)

Figure 1: Section taken from a case study on the experience of Danielle McConville, Queen's University Belfast.[2]

The good news is that if you can integrate the resource and thereby motivate student engagement, **the results in terms of student outcomes and feedback can be great**, as these comments testify:

> *Students don't tend to give much positive feedback about anything; however, I've had a few emails and anecdotal comments they've said they like Revel, [it's] their favourite assignment.*

> *Use of MyLab Math has helped the skills and confidence of those students who engage with it. Student feedback for the resource has been all positive.*

References

1 Pearson (2021) *10 tips for the best online assessments* [Accessed: https://www.pearson.com/uk/educators/higher-education-educators/success-stories/2021/01/10-tips-for-the-best-online-assessments.html]

2 Pearson (2020) *MyLab Accounting at Queen's University Belfast, UK, An efficient and effective way to teach non-specialist students* [Accessed: https://www.pearson.com/uk/educators/higher-education-educators/success-stories/2020/07/mylab-accounting-at-queens-university.html]