

**Case Study**

**Keele  
University  
Management  
School**

Economics Department



# About Keele University Management School

## How McGraw-Hill Education's Connect is helping Economics students engage and achieve better grades.

Keele Management School offers a range of undergraduate (dual and single honours) and postgraduate programmes in accounting, finance, economics, human resource management, marketing, and international business and law.

They are renowned for exceptional student satisfaction across their undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Through their research led curriculum and passion for teaching they produce graduates that are intellectually curious about the application of knowledge. This enables their graduates to be highly employable and have successful careers within their chosen professions.

Keele Management School is part of Keele University, whose mission is to provide a distinctive course offer, whether single honours or combined, that is relevant to the needs of the world today and in the future. They want to ensure that all their students leave Keele with a range of skills, not just academic, which will equip them for a long and successful future.

## Case Study Facts

### Instructor/s:

Dr Panos Sousounis and Dr Chistopher Tsoukis

### Course:

1st Year  
Microeconomics /  
Macroeconomics

### Number of Students:

>120 students

### Digital Product in Use:

Connect®

### Who is this case study relevant to?

Course designers looking to integrate digital technology and ensure students are engaging with recommended course materials.

### Program in Use:

Connect Principles of Microeconomics

## The Story

Introductory Microeconomics and Introductory Macroeconomics are compulsory 1st year modules for undergraduate Economics students and optional for students across Management School programmes, that are taken in the first and second semesters by around 120 students each year. They offer an essential foundation for further disciplinary study and a high achievement rate is therefore crucial for subsequent years of study. Yet as novices in the world of higher education, some students initially lack the discipline or simply the 'learning to learn' strategies required to get full benefit from the course.

Teaching faculty at Keele Management School were noticing that students would often forgo the cost of the course textbook, for example, preferring instead to rely on lecture notes and slides combined with their own internet research for back up. While this may be a natural consequence of the free availability of content and knowledge on the web, staff were becoming increasingly concerned about the quality, reliability and breadth of sources of information being accessed. Students would read little bits of information from all over, not necessarily covering all the learning objectives of the module. Wikipedia was regularly cited as a principle source of information.

Staff at the time were contemplating the development of a suite of on-line resources for these modules. While discussing the modules' needs in terms of learning material (textbooks etc.) with McGraw-Hill Education representative, Gemma, she mentioned the Connect platform as a possible tool. After exploring Connect in more depth following an initial demonstration, the lecturers decided to adopt it without hesitation.

“Connect offers a blend of access to the textbook matter, formative assessments/quizzes and learner analytics that addresses all challenging areas we had identified in the modules' delivery. Plus very effective technical support.”  
Dr Panos Sousounis

“Connect offers a blend of access to the textbook matter, formative assessments/quizzes and learner analytics that addresses all challenging areas we had identified in the modules' delivery. Plus very effective technical support.”

Dr Panos Sousounis

## The Solution

In a bid to encourage students to engage with the official course literature, the school introduced McGraw-Hill Education's Connect for these modules, initially on a voluntary basis so that students had the option of accessing the textbook content online. This has had a profound positive effect on the performance of students who opted-in, so the following year the faculty decided to make it an integral – and mandatory – part of the course, taking out an institutional subscription that removes the direct cost burden from students.

Dr Panos Sousounis worked with the McGraw-Hill Education consultant to explore the full potential of the platform and understand the many ways it could be used to enhance teaching and assessment. “It does a lot of things, and you can tailor it,” he says. “It was important for staff to get really used to it before we rolled it out to avoid frustration, and Gemma was really useful in showing us how to use it and how to set up tests. At first, we introduced it in a gradual manner, week by week, and kept reviewing it with students to see what they thought. Some colleagues were apprehensive at first but were soon convinced. The Graduate Teaching Assistants particularly like it because it's new age – it's what the students are going to have to do more of.”

Now the use of Connect has settled into an established framework. Following each weekly lecture students are assigned a supporting chapter or chapters to read via Connect or Blackboard. They are given questions to answer each week – using the textbooks to find the answers – ahead of seminar classes where they can dig deeper and discuss the questions with a Graduate Teaching Assistant. As a result, staff are seeing that students come much better prepared to seminars and tutorials and are getting used to engaging with suggested course material rather than relying on Google.

Connect is also used as a tool for ongoing formative assessment throughout the course and as a platform for the mid-term summative assessment. Indeed, Dr Sousounis says that the student analytics that Connect is able to provide is one of the most valuable aspects of the programme. He is able to see how often and for how long each student is accessing the course material. The majority are spending at least a couple of hours per week on it – and the impact is tangible.

## The Results

The average mark achieved for the module has increased by 8-10%, while the overall pass rate has increased by around 10%. There appears to be a clear correlation between better grades and the amount of time students dedicate to the materials. “The pass rate fully legitimises the cost,” he says.

## What do the students think?

Students are offered formative instruction on how to use the platform to ensure they are comfortable with it. “Those who haven't been around computers a lot can be a little reluctant,” explains Dr Sousounis, “but for the vast majority learning online is something that they're used to. They're more and more familiar with using the Internet as a research tool and Connect mirrors that – allowing them to use the digital channel for learning while still ensuring that they're using a credible and complete source of information. We're starting to see Connect mentioned in our module evaluations, and students like it. It's how they operate.”

“It went together very well with the book and the lecture slides. The SmartBook Practice and Recharge Questions were particularly useful for revision.”

“It went together very well with the book and the lecture slides. The SmartBook Practice and Recharge Questions were particularly useful for revision.”