

Notes on “What I’d like to do with Blackboard but can’t” session, held 20th May 2010

From the first event for the VLE Selection project at QMUL

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The following notes are intended to capture discussions at the event. They are not a set of detailed requirements and are comprised of the thoughts and views of attending colleagues. Please ask permission before linking to or using these materials (s.brenton@qmul.ac.uk).

1 User interface issues

More control over the look of Blackboard

- The example given in the session was changing tool names to make more sense. Outside of the session I know that people have requested the ability to be able to “brand” the VLE in a different way...e.g. the Medical School. I would also suggest that this could also relate to the desire for a “proper” notion of a template.

Being able to view more than one page at once

Drag and drop for files and folders would be desirable.

Teach and Build views is a clumsy way to divide up the tools

2 Assessment

More flexible quiz tool

Anonymous marking

Ability to provide grades and feedback for work not done on or through the VLE.

Batch processing for printing submissions.

It should be possible to bulk upload grades, comments and even associated files by spreadsheet upload and/or with correctly named files

It should also be possible to mark offline

Anonymous marking in any grade-able tool

Printing exam scripts from quizzes and mass printing assignments with VLE-generated cover sheets

More tools should be grade-able (blogs, wiki's, image galleries, etc.)

Grading and comments should be possible without actual student uploads (to allow the Teaching tools to be used for work submitted offline)

3 Content

Student content creation tools

- there was a comment here that while external tools can be used, this is problematic in that students have to sign up. It is interesting to note is how much desire there is to use external tools and what the perceived problems with it are.

Better support for mathematical notation

- Not surprisingly, this came from the Maths department. They mentioned a built-in tool for processing LaTeX files as being desirable.

Easier ways to deal with multi-media content

Content sharing across modules

- The ability to reuse resources across different modules.

Online editing

- Getting away from the need to download, edit and upload files.

Deep linking

Automatic file conversion

- I think the example given was to automatically convert files uploaded to PDF. I suspect this is related specifically to the area of student coursework submissions but I could be wrong.
- As mentioned above, Maths thought a LaTeX processor would be useful.

4 Communications

Messaging system is inflexible, even for a closed messaging system

Multi-channel communications

- There are lots of College systems which communicate with students and the students should be able to control how they receive different communications.

Integration with email.

SMS announcements

5 Access control/Course management

Why is the enrolment functionality in the Gradebook?

- It appears to be a fairly universal view that doing access control through the Gradebook is counter-intuitive. Another related comment was that they wanted to see only the students in the Gradebook, not everyone enrolled on the course.

Emphasis on closed module based system not a good thing

- The comment was that students should be able to dip in and dip out of anything they like including courses they're not officially taking and those they've taken in previous years. This could potentially point to an access control model that allows universal access to everything or only to some things (e.g. course content) but still allows some elements to be closed...the assignment dropbox for the course.

Ability to "do more" with the group tool

- I think the specific comment was to be able to export group information from the VLE for things like class lists.

Having the student ID as the main identifier in the VLE and not their username.

Access for non-QM staff

- This relates to the comments made from the SMD which are obviously worth noting but it's hard to know where to put them. The problem described was not necessarily about non-QM staff having access to the VLE but was about how to make it easy for them to do things with it when they may only log in once a year to upload a file.

It would be useful to be able to more closely define access and control (e.g. having 'build' access to one page in one section)

6 Platform

Support for mobile devices.

Better Mac compatibility.

Getting rid of Java.

7 Integration

Integration with Facebook

- Facebook was mentioned a couple of times with perhaps a slightly different emphasis each time. One comment was about identifying why students like to use Facebook to find out if there's anything to learn there and the other was about integration with Facebook.

Admin need more control over data in Blackboard (for example - we should be able to import any column we like into the gradebook from SIS)

8. Customisation

- Even in a very minor way - being able to change the word for "profile" to something else- this should work at a fine-grain level (i.e. each department should be able to use their own terminology for tools)
- The student should have much more control over the appearance - changing font faces, sizes at least