

## **Reviewing Blackboard sites to raise minimum engagement across the institution**

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# Reviewing Blackboard sites to raise minimum engagement across the institution

#BbTLC16 :

Brian Irwin, Chloe Benning, Laura McNally

INNOVATE  
&EDUCATE | Teaching & Learning  
Conference by Blackboard®  
**2016** Groningen  
6th - 8th April

# Session outline

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- Introduce our minimum expectations of e-learning
- Explain the review of those expectations
- Present the outcomes of the review and how they are being used
- Discuss challenges and recommendations for others' considering a similar review

# About Sheffield Hallam University

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- 6th largest university in the UK
- Over 31,500 students (24,600 undergraduate and 6,900 postgraduate students)
- Over 2,150 academic staff
- 4 teaching faculties covering 18 academic departments



# Developing the minimum expectations

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- 2011-12 academic year
- Looked at other institutions' VLE minimum standards
- Reviewed existing policies in our Faculties
- Did research with students
- Approved in summer 2012, with modifications in January 2013.



# Showing the minimum expectations

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- Every module should be supported by a Blackboard site. Other tools should be linked to from it
- 1. Sites are easy to navigate and provide access to core information
  - Plan the module site structure for clear and quick access to key information, including meaningful names for areas and items
  - Include the module handbook, ensuring that essential information is easy to locate
  - Provide access to learning materials such as lecture notes and handouts
  - Link to the online resource list for the module
  - Keep resources and links up-to-date

# Showing the minimum expectations

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- 2. Communication is consistent and expectations are set and met
  - Establish a shared approach to communication for the module e.g. how students will be told of room changes; new content; deadline reminders; events etc.
  - Use a welcome announcement to introduce the module & signpost essential content
  - Let students know how they will get module information; how regularly they should access the site and the kinds of activities expected of them on it
  - Include staff contact details for all module staff
  - Provide the support and guidance students need to participate in e-learning activities relevant to this module

# Showing the minimum expectations

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- 3. Assessments and feedback are clearly presented
  - Determine which aspects of the module assessment can be delivered online
  - Provide assessment briefs and grading criteria for all assessments
  - Articulate how and when students can expect to receive feedback on their work, and the format in which feedback will be delivered
  - Use Grade Centre to make provisional marks available to students



# The problem with minimum expectations

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- They are boring
- Hygiene factors for students
- Everyone thinks they are already doing them
- Consistency is key
- And...
- We want folks to be doing much more



# Initial review of expectations

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- Summer 2014, to initiate a transition to policy
- Reviewed other institutions' policies again
- Reviewed the text of the expectations to adjust for clarity
- Gathered data we could about how much we were meeting the expectations
  - Blackboard site existence, Grade Centre with marks, online reading list, staff contact details
- Identified best practices in supporting staff to meet the expectations

# Outcomes of the initial review

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- Highlighted data issues
  - Quality of data in our SIS
  - Couldn't get data on many of the expectations
- Revision of the language used in the expectations
  - Confusing or unclear
  - Expectations that provided too much choice
  - Aspirational expectations
- Best practice from one Faculty of reviewing Blackboard sites using an intern and providing reports to module leaders

# Review of all Blackboard sites

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- Deputy-Vice Chancellor secured funding to hire two graduate interns in Feb 2015



Chloe



Laura

- Goals of the review:
  - Support staff with moving to the new policy
  - Provide management information to departments and faculties to enable them to support staff with meeting the standards
  - Gain a complete picture about how well we were meeting the minimum expectations

# Agreed methodology

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- Defined what will be reviewed with stakeholders for each Faculty
  - additional items added for the Faculty
- Gathered data about the modules to be reviewed
- One intern reviewed the module Blackboard site
- [Google form used for each Faculty](#), responses collated in 4 spreadsheets
- The other intern cross-checked a sample of reviews to ensure consistency of approach

# Blackboard sites reviewed

Table 1: Modules supported by a Blackboard module site

Blackboard Site Status	No.	%
Available Site	2457	80.74
Module Linked to another Site	126	4.14
Unavailable Site	134	4.40
Archived Site	45	1.48
No Blackboard Site	281	9.23
<b>Total</b>	<b>3043</b>	



We didn't review sites that had previously been reviewed,  
or where the whole area was being revalidated

# Sample individual module reports

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- [Example of Chloe's reports](#)
- [Example of Laura's reports](#)

# Sample departmental report

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- An example of one of Chloe's [departmental reports](#)
- Most of the time the information was presented in a presentation to the department as well (either a management meeting or the whole department)



# How well did we meet the expectations?

Table 3: A breakdown of sites meeting, nearly meeting and not meeting the minimum expectations across SHU.  
[View a chart of these results here.](#)

	Met (all expectations 'met')		Nearly Met (nearly all expectations 'met')		Not Met (very few expectations 'met')	
Overall Site Status	413	16.81%	1534	62.43%	510	20.76%
Minimum Expectations	Met		Nearly Met		Not Met	
Welcome announcement	991	40.33%	6	0.24%	1460	59.42%
Staff contact details	1801	73.30%	73	2.97%	583	23.73%
Directions and expectations on use of site	584	23.77%	665	27.07%	1208	49.17%
'Blackboard Help' available	2423	98.62%	2	0.08%	32	1.30%
Site and its content is up-to-date	2413	98.21%	25	1.02%	19	0.77%
Module information (e.g. Module Guide)	1972	80.26%	159	6.47%	326	13.27%
Learning materials (e.g. lecture slides)	2206	89.78%	95	3.87%	156	6.35%
Clear structure	2029	82.58%	364	14.81%	64	2.60%
Meaningful content titles	1935	78.75%	439	17.87%	83	3.38%
Resource List Online (RLO) link	1033	42.04%	10	0.41%	1414	57.55%
Online support resources	1257	51.16%	954	38.83%	246	10.01%
Assessment briefs	2143	87.22%	28	1.14%	286	11.64%
Marking criteria	1734	70.57%	200	8.14%	523	21.29%
Marks in the Grade Centre	2055	83.64%	318	12.94%	84	3.42%

# Things beyond the expectations

Table 4: Breakdown of 2014/15 Blackboard sites showing use of online learning tools at SHU

E-Learning Tool	Total sites (at least)	
Online submission	1387	56.45%
Turnitin	906	36.87%
Online Discussions (BB Discussion Board)	364	14.81%
Online Feedback	359	14.61%
BB Groups (with enrolments)	257	10.46%
Online Tests	162	6.59%
Screencasts	These items were not looked for consistently	
Blogs		
Social Media (Twitter, Facebook)		
Link to Pebble+		
Wikis		
Link to submission in PebblePad(ATLAS)		
BB Collaborate		
PowerPoint tool (Prezi)		
Padlet		
Other webinar/Skype/e-lectures/lecture capture		
Other tool (e.g. Google Apps, Pinterest, RSS, Storify, QR Code etc.)		

# Challenges faced in the review

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- Data, data, data!
- Communication about the review process
- Distribution of reports
  - Timing, due to communication needed
  - Ensuring distribution
    - Changed module leaders
    - Different Faculty approaches
- Timing of the reviews
- Time taken greater than anticipated

# Reaction to the reviews

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- Generally positive from staff:
- *"Thanks for the comprehensive report and the effort you have put into these."*
- *"You probably get a lot of negative comments from academics who think they know better, blah, blah, blah, but seeing what a big task you have done and its repetitiveness, I for one would like to say thank you for highlighting various areas that will help improve student perception of the module site I am responsible for."*
- Though of course some negative comments:
- *"I do agree with several of the objectives you lay out, but I'm not convinced that either the approach of the "standard" nor Blackboard as the tool are the right way to proceed, and I've never felt that any universal policy in TLA imposed by SHU has universal merit." (part of a two page response!)*

# What's happened as a result of the reviews

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- [Threshold standards](#) became policy in Nov 2015
- Workshops with departments to encourage meeting the standards based on needs identified in reports
- Institutional report went to the Learning and Teaching Committee to highlight the gap and call for action
- Further action planned around some of the most poorly met standards, such as Resource Lists Online



# Would we do it again?

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- Yes, definitely (if we had the money)
- With better data it would've been much easier
- Timing could have been improved with more resource in a shorter period
- Will likely do some random spot checks in the future instead, given budget constraints

# Encouraging people to go beyond

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- Different approaches at different institutions
- How do deal with the pedagogy question?
  - Menu of teaching approaches - <http://go.shu.ac.uk/teachingapproachsmenu>
  - Presentation at [http://bbbb.blackboard.com/SHUWebinar\\_Resources](http://bbbb.blackboard.com/SHUWebinar_Resources)
- Exploring providing [suggestions for each area](#) in the threshold standards
- As well as [how we promote](#) individuals to improve their practice

# Questions?

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- Any questions?
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