

Central Learning Environment Implementation Faculty Forum

To better understand the student experience of using our current CLE tool Blackboard FSE eLearning ran a session at Faculty Forum. The experiences of students will be used to help guide and shape the planning and preparation for the implementation of canvas in September 2025.

Survey Results

Who completed the Survey

A total of **57** students completed the survey. **26** of those were from the School of Engineering and **31** from the School of Natural Sciences. **42** Students were studying undergraduate programmes and **15** Postgraduate programmes.

Whilst the number of survey completers is a fraction of the overall numbers of students in Science and Engineering, the make-up of the group was representative to the overall student body. It's also key to realise that many of the issues flagged within this report have been anecdotally reported by students many times over the years through various sources including Unit Evaluations and NSS scores.

For the purposes of this report the term 'students' will be used to refer to students who completed the survey.

Blackboard Access

The initial set of questions were relating to Blackboard usage for students. **Students access Blackboard on a daily basis (92%) to access learning materials, submit assessments, access feedback and watch video content with 96% of students feeling Blackboard was effective at supporting their learning.** Students are accessing their Blackboard content **mainly on personal laptop devices (80%)**, with a large drop off to tablets (10%) and mobile devices (5%).

When asked to specify the level of importance of a range of items students felt that **Intended Learning Outcomes, Lecturer contact information, information on what students are expected to do and list of tools and technologies used within the course** as being *very important*. Items being viewed as *important but less critical* would be details on **digital and employability skills, links to study skills information and a welcome/overview video of the course unit**. The following items provided a broader mixed response including significant response rate of '*not important*': **photos of the lecturer, information on wellbeing and links to social networks and societies**.

Community Spaces

Community spaces were accessed by students much less frequently than course unit spaces. With a **third of students saying they had never accessed a Community space** and many who didn't know what they were.

For those who had accessed them **accessing programme handbook and completing compulsory training** were the main activities.

Students generally agreed (45%) that community spaces were well organised but in contrast many indicated that they **preferred to directly contact the Student Support hubs over the community spaces** should they have a programme related question, because they either **forgot community spaces were there** or they **could not find what they needed within them**.

Students indicated that the University website was an often used resource for programme level information along with Blackboard however they felt that **Blackboard (84%) was the right space for such information** compared to Teams (5%) or SharePoint(3%).

Designing future Learning Spaces

Students indicated that **PDFs were their preferred format for learning materials (79%)**, closely followed by **Video (68%)** and **Powerpoint (60%)**.

Students preferred **materials to be structured in a weekly (79%) format**. With **all materials being available to students from the start of the course (65%)**.

Students want clear and consistent information labelling what content is core and what is additional/further reading (96%) as well as clear guidance on **what Students are expected to do within the course (95%)** and **when they are expected to do it (95%)**. 74% of students indicated a preference for **guidance on how long they should spend on an activity**.

Open Questions

Students were asked a series of open questions to help identify what it was that made their spaces valuable or frustrating to them with students encouraged to describe the issues and their impact. Clear patterns could be seen within the responses with virtually every student mentioning aspects of content organisation as being a frustration or a value depending on their experience.

What frustrates Students

Organisation and Navigation: Lack of consistency in the organisation of course spaces and variations in how lecturers structure their units cause confusion and contribute to a perception of disorganisation. This includes issues like content being scattered across different folders, unavailability of folders for lectures, and difficulty finding specific materials. Inconsistencies in how assignments, deadlines, and grades are presented across different courses contribute to navigation challenges for students.

Content Accessibility and Timeliness: Delays in uploading lecture recordings and disorganized course materials, including missing lecture materials and outdated information, negatively impact the accessibility and timeliness of learning resources.

Assessment and Feedback: Students express frustrations about the lack of timely and sufficient feedback. Some also report difficulties in accessing past papers and essential

resources relevant to lectures. Inconsistencies in how assignments, deadlines, and grades are presented across different courses contribute to navigation challenges for students.

What do Students value

Importance of Organization: Many respondents emphasize the significance of well-organized courses. This includes clear constructions, weekly updates, and structured content divided into weekly sections.

Accessibility of Information: A recurring theme is the ease of access to course content. Students value platforms that allow quick loading times, easy navigation through folders, and centralized spaces for all necessary materials..

Weekly Structure and Transparency: Students appreciate courses that are structured weekly, providing a clear outline of expectations, deadlines, and study hours. This transparent approach aids in better planning and organization, contributing to a more streamlined learning process.

Conclusions

It's clear that Blackboard/Central Learning Environment has become an integral part of the student learning experience. The main frustration expressed by an over whelming number of students is the lack of consistency between spaces, even "well designed" spaces can contribute negatively to the student experience if they differ from other "well designed" spaces. The problem is not how well individual course spaces are organised but how consistent that structure is across a programme of study.

In summary, students value well-organised, accessible courses with explicit guidance and weekly structures. Addressing these issues can significantly enhance the overall online learning experience for students.

It would appear that a significant step change in Student Experience can be achieved by improving the consistency of design across course a programme of course unit spaces as well as increasing and improving the amount of guidance, scaffolding and supporting information within an online space.

Such a consistency of design should focus on the following principles;

- Weekly presentation of materials with a clear linear pathway through materials
- All materials available throughout the course
- Explicit guidance and expectations on how the course will be taught and what students are expected to do and when they are expected to do it
- Clear guidance on what materials is core material and what is additional/further material
- Consistent approach to where students find Assessment briefs/submission points and assessment feedback.