

Should we be providing more online student support for Moodle?

Aurel Diamond
Student Intern
ahd22@bath.ac.uk

Andy Ramsden
Head of e-Learning
a.ramsden@bath.ac.uk

Learning & Teaching Enhancement Office
University of Bath

August 5, 2009

Information Sheet

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Introduction

Moodle is the University of Bath's centrally supported Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). The ability for students to efficiently and effectively use Moodle is paramount, and it is critical that adequate support is provided to users. This paper reports on the findings of a recent student survey on Moodle support requirements.

Given the technical skills of students it is hoped our How-To Guides in the Student Area (<http://go.bath.ac.uk/9crz>) and the Moodle FAQ Area (<http://moodle.bath.ac.uk/faq/>) would be adequate to meet their ongoing support needs, especially when combined with available face to face support through the SORTED programme and departmental training sessions.

There were few reported problems with using Moodle, suggesting that the current support available is sufficient. However, we might now look to enhance the way we combine student help with other online support material. This could be supported by improving the integration with existing face to face support routes.

Methodology

The survey was conducted using Bristol Online Surveys (see Appendix 1) between 03/07/2009 and 19/07/2009. The survey was advertised through a Facebook event on the University of Bath network, and a link was provided in Moodle.

Results and Analysis

There were a total of 167 respondents. The full results are available in Appendix 2.

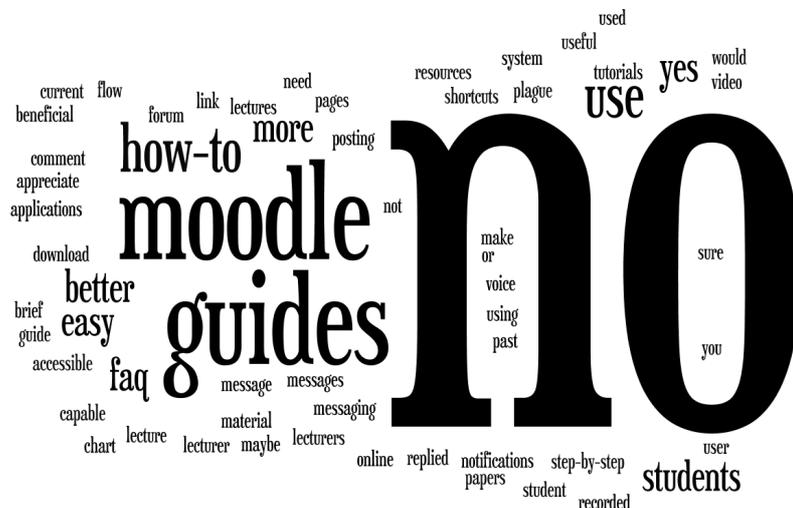
Despite receiving responses from students studying a wide variety of subjects, the split was not particularly even, so we must not automatically assume that this sample is representative of the whole student body. In any case, with nearly 70% of respondents accessing Moodle more than 3 times a week (question 1), this group does give a very good indication of the student support requirements. Filtering the results by amount of Moodle use, we see clearly that our results for heavy and light users of Moodle are similar and consistent.

It is evident most students rated Moodle as being very usable, with 70% suggesting it was very easy or easy to use (Question 6).

Reassuringly, the results to question 2 indicate that only 12% of students ever did seek help on how to use Moodle; so unless students are nonchalantly ignoring problems they encounter with their VLE, there's no strong evidence to suggest a large proportion of students are existing with unaddressed problems. The results of Question 9 support this emerging message with less than 20% having attended a training session; it appears that most students are able to get to at least a basic grasp of Moodle without any help.

If a student needed help, it seems that they'd usually ask a friend or colleague before anyone else. This could be for a variety of reasons left unidentifiable by our survey- it could be more convenient, or simply less embarrassing. Interestingly, only one student suggested that they used the FAQ section, and nobody claims to have looked in any of the How-To Guides (question 3). Therefore, the emphasis of our support should be to re-enforce the "wisdom of the crowds" by ensuring we provide easy accessible, online support in one place.

The following word cloud (from www.wordle.net) displays the outcomes of asking if students felt they needed more online support (such as FAQs/How-To Guides):



The word cloud illustrates the answer is ‘no, [we do not need more online support]’. Nonetheless, there are still a few other prominent ideas. Notably, there seems to be a need for how-to guides, and perhaps better/easier access to them. The same may apply for FAQs.

The results to Question 7 can now be used to determine what sort of information is lacking. The main issue is clearly the navigation; some call it “confusing” or “hard”, “counterintuitive” or simply say that it’s “difficult to find things.” There already exists a How-To Guide on Customisation and Navigation of Moodle- we just need to signpost students to this guide more effectively.

Some comments also raised support needs for using forums and messaging. Given the amount of labour required to produce new e-books or guides and how little the current guides are being used, the most effective approach would be to provide links to the e-books from library systems and Moodle FAQs. We must remember that this is only the general case, and ultimately, forums on courses are controlled by the course teachers, who must therefore consider student needs when designing their Moodle courses.

Conclusions

We can draw the following from our findings:

1. There is no need to develop a significant amount of new support material.
2. We should point staff and students at existing material for effective use of all aspects of Moodle. In particular, the inclusion of reference to our Moodle e-book collection may enhance the way the forum and messaging services are used.

University staff ought to consider the results of this survey when developing Moodle courses and induction programmes, so our findings will be disseminated as appropriate. It will be very useful to repeat this piece of work next year to ensure we continue to capture the student voice in terms of their experiences and perceived support needs.

Appendix 1: Survey Questions

The full survey is shown below:

1. During your last semester at university, how often would you log into Moodle (on average)?
 - Over 5 times a week
 - 3-4 times a week
 - 1-2 times a week
 - Less than once a week

2. During your last semester at university, did you ever seek help on how to use Moodle?
 - Yes
 - No
3. If yes, where did you look for help? (select all that apply)
 - Friends / Colleagues
 - Lecturer
 - Staff in the Department / School
 - The central e-learning team (e-learning@bath.ac.uk)
 - Other (please specify)
4. During your last semester at university, did you visit the Student Area on Moodle? (<http://go.bath.ac.uk/9crz>)
 - Yes
 - No
5. During your last semester at university, did you visit the Moodle FAQ area? (<http://moodle.bath.ac.uk/faq/>)
 - Yes
 - No
6. How would you rate the usability of Moodle?
 - Very good (I find Moodle very easy to use)
 - Good
 - Okay
 - Bad
 - Very bad (I find Moodle very difficult to use)
7. Which (if any) parts of Moodle do you find difficult to use or understand?
8. Do you feel that you need more online support (such as FAQs/How-To Guides) in order to achieve your tasks on Moodle? If yes, please briefly explain your answer:
9. Have you attended any Moodle training sessions? (select all that apply)
 - Yes, the SORTED Moodle training scheme
 - Yes, a department based Moodle training session
 - No
 - Other (please specify)
10. Which department do/did you study with?

Appendix 2: Survey Results

1. During your last semester at university, how often would you log into Moodle (on average)?			
over 5 times a week:		43.1 %	72
3-4 times a week:		26.3 %	44
1-2 times a week:		19.2 %	32

less than once a week:		11.4 %	19
2. During your last semester at university, did you ever seek help on how to use Moodle?			
Yes:		12.0 %	20
No:		88.0 %	147
3. If yes, where did you look for help?			
Friends / Colleagues:		n/a	16
Lecturer:		n/a	6
Staff in the Department / School:		n/a	7
The central e-learning team (e-learning@bath.ac.uk):		n/a	4
Other (please specify):		n/a	1
FAQ			
4. During your last semester at university, did you visit the Student Area on Moodle? (http://go.bath.ac.uk/9crz)			
Yes:		32.9 %	55
No:		67.1 %	112
5. During your last semester at university, did you visit the Moodle FAQ area? (http://moodle.bath.ac.uk/fag/)			
Yes:		15.0 %	25
No:		85.0 %	142
6. How would you rate the usability of Moodle?			
Very good (I find Moodle very easy to use):		26.9%	45

Good:		43.1%	72
Okay:		25.7%	43
Bad:		3.6%	6
Very bad (I find Moodle very difficult to use):		0.6%	1

7. Which (if any) parts of Moodle do you find difficult to use or understand?

-

At first, the examination table

Confusing navigation for IEM course. Poor linkage of on-line text with print version (ie no Workbook numbers given online!) Oddly segmented course info. Seems to be designed by people highly familiar with the course/Uni so it doesn't relate to distance learners who have no of those reference points.

Don't feel visually it is as clear as it could be. Would be nice to have a link of the UoB home page.

Finding discussion forums - I'm sure there used to be more. And also, you have to go into your enrolled courses to find the forums for those course. Would be better if all forums were listed on front page.

General layout could be better

hard to find things that arent lecture notes... ie student forum/chat rooms etc Needs to be simple and have one main page for the subject area

Hard to navigate through. Everywhere looks the same so its easy to forget where a certain link is.

<http://moodle.bath.ac.uk/mod/resource/view.php?id=69138> didnt work out how to use the jump to box for a while!

I do not think enough training was given in the beginning, the computer sessions could have been used for this, It may be useful if Access students were taught to use moodle before they get here or in the summer holidays.

I find Moodle Messaging not to be so friendly to use.

It should be possible to choose which order the unit's appear on the home page. Also, we should be able to change the colour scheme and move components around the page to suit us. It would be good to have a departmental home page on there as well.

It's just quite counterintuitive. The links and everything seem quite hard to get to. It's hard to know what information is on there (although that is probably the fault of individual departments)

Message posting is often unusual or restricted

Navigation
none
none
None
not all of my unit conveyors use moodle so it is inconvenient that not all resources are in the same place
Preferred the previous version as it was more user friendly
should be a guide when students first log in as freshers which walks you quickly through all the major parts
So lecturers don't seem to know how to organise stuff and lump everything together in one folder with unhelpful file names. But a lot of the do separate material into lectures or topics and make it obvious what each file is.
some of the content could be structured better
Sometimes it is difficult to find things that have been posted by the careers office for example
Sometimes too many links on one page, this is moer Maths specific though
the forum
The Messaging section - it is just totally unusable and worthless in its current state. An integration with Webmail with links to preview Moodle content from e-mail message would be appreciated.
The messaging tool doesn't have enough advantages over traditional email....I quesiton the point of it being there.
The navigation of the courses especially when alot of teachers are signed up making the list very long
The overall process to follow is very confusing. Moodle is slow which causes the occasional problem.
Uploading Assignment function is difficult to use and never clear if the document has uploaded there is no confirmation given that your document has been submitted.
uploading assignments. The information on how to do this was different to how it actually worked
Visually it isn't very easy to use. Doesn't seem to have many functions - can't even change my password, even checked FAQ and nothing about it there.
When I search for courses relevant to my course they dont come up..
why do the lectures find it so hard to use... they really have no idea
8. Do you feel that you need more online support (such as FAQs/How-To Guides) in order to achieve your tasks on Moodle? If yes, please briefly explain your answer:

a link to past papers on moodle would be fantastic!
FAQs are a plague that rarely deliver. Prompt helpdesk would be good.
I don't think so. Just having the right information would be ok.
I feel that there are probably a lot of parts of moodle which i have never used, or even know about. How-to guides or even shortcuts to other pages/applications would make using Moodle more beneficial. (currently i just use it to download my lecture material, but im sure there is plenty more i could be using it for..?)
It would be better if lectures can be recorded(voice) and put on moodle.
just brief guides, or video tutorials...something that guides you ste-by-step
Maybe
need more notifications - e.g when a lecturer puts a comment or student have replied in a forum
No
No - easy to use, just nothing useful on it.

No just a better messaging system incorporated.			
no, appart from maybe more info on message posting.			
No, so far have found it easy enough (through first and second years)			
No.			
no.			
No. Def not. Most students are more than capable of handling Moodle and would probably appreciate the resources being put somewhere else, like in the library (making sure computers are working..).			
Not really			
Not really			
Some sort of online guide would be useful, maybe on BathStudent rather than having to hunt through Moodle to find the FAQs			
the guide suggested in answer to question 7 should be accessible throughout and have a clear icon to start it up on every page of the moodle system			
wouldnt be a bad thing...but its the tutors and lectures that need the help			
Yes, How to guides			
Yes. I believe a flow chart of some kind is required to explain what students are meant to do, in what order (or simultaneously) where and how to do it. Also, a user manual on how to do certain things within Moodle is required. Overall, I find Moodle so difficult to work with that it isn't work using. A simpler process for blogging and posting messages must be available.			
9. Have you attended any Moodle training sessions?			
Yes, the SORTED Moodle training scheme:		n/a	1
Yes, a department based Moodle training session:		n/a	29
No:		n/a	138
Other (please specify):		n/a	4
in EC Research and Computing			
Not really made aware of these			
Summer school			
were there any!?!?			
10. Which department do/did you study with?			

Architecture and Civil Engineering:		7.8%	13
Biology and Biochemistry:		5.4%	9
Chemical Engineering:		5.4%	9
Chemistry:		1.2%	2
Computer Science:		6.0%	10
Cross-Departmental (i.e. Maths+Physics/NatSci/I MEE):		3.6%	6
Division for Lifelong Learning:		0.0%	0
Economics and International Development:		2.4%	4
Education:		6.0%	10
Electronic and Electrical Engineering:		2.4%	4
European Studies and Modern Languages:		3.6%	6
Health, School for:		4.8%	8
Management, School of:		10.2%	17
Mathematical Sciences:		13.2%	22
Mechanical Engineering:		6.0%	10
Pharmacy and Pharmacology:		9.6%	16
Physics:		5.4%	9
Psychology:		1.8%	3
Social and Policy Sciences:		5.4%	9