



BUCKINGHAMSHIRE
NEW UNIVERSITY

EST. 1891



E-LEARNING & VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT (VLE) POLICY

November 2005

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This document makes reference to the Buckinghamshire New University document: Strategy for Teaching, Learning and Assessment 2002-05

Preamble

All University formal documents relate to the policies, strategies, procedures and regulations of the University having been approved by the appropriate formally recognised and constituted body. All University employees and students are required to adhere to the formal processes and regulations of the University.

This document should not be read in isolation as other University processes/formal documents could be relevant. A full listing of all formal documents is available on the University's website.

Any interpretation of the content of this formal document will be at the discretion of Senate.

All previous versions of this document as approved by Senate before November 2005 shall be rescinded.

The names of committees and titles of posts may change from time to time. This shall not invalidate the powers of the equivalent successor committees or post holders.

We will consider any requests for accessible formats eg Braille, tape, disc, email or a larger font size. Please let us know what you need by contacting Academic Quality Directorate.

1 Background

- 1.1 The Blackboard Learning System was implemented in August 2002 as the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) to be used across the University. This brought together several growing uses of ICT to support learning and teaching within a common framework. Blackboard was chosen particularly because of its ease of use. It was initially rolled out through two pilots in each faculty. There was an awareness campaign at the same time, with workshops and training delivered by faculty staff, LIS and QED. Since that time it has been used enthusiastically by some staff and not at all by other staff.
- 1.2 The Blackboard Learning System was upgraded in August 2004 and the Blackboard Content System (BbCS) was implemented at the same time. The combination provides a very powerful tool to support many areas of activity including an e-portfolio for student Personal Development Planning. This requires a greater level of training to use effectively, so its roll-out was delayed until an extra member of staff was appointed to support Blackboard use.
- 1.3 The use of Blackboard has highlighted some issues with other systems and processes in the University. Inability to gain access to Blackboard by some staff and students has been due to problems with enrolments, problems with hardware and software used elsewhere, and insufficient training. Its introduction has been a catalyst to improve these too.
- 1.4 The Students' Union has pointed out that one of the students' top five complaints is that all lecturers are not using Blackboard, particularly not depositing lecture notes.
- 1.5 At the initial training it was agreed by Deans that Blackboard should not be used merely as an add-on, but that the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy of programmes and modules should discuss how Blackboard would be used to support learning in each programme and module.
- 1.6 In the first year of use, the Academic Registrar advised that Blackboard should only be used for formative assessment, not summative, because of the issue of knowing who had undertaken the work. Since then it has been acknowledged that this is the same as for all assessment other than supervised handwritten work such as examinations.
- 1.7 The Strategy for Teaching, Learning and Assessment 2002-05 proposed cautious uptake of ICT to support learning and teaching, as follows:

'The University is currently developing a virtual learning environment to support student learning. This will require careful planning and considerable well-targeted staff development. The introduction of the VLE will proceed cautiously and will initially be piloted in a relatively small number of modules. It is anticipated that the VLE will facilitate more effective communication with students; easier access to comprehensive course related information and will support new approaches to teaching, learning and assessment'.

Specific activities to support this area of development will include:

 - a) Providing support for development of online resources and assessment
 - b) Provision of staff development to facilitate the effective use of computer and web based resources and facilities
 - c) Upgrading facilities for staff IT training to support staff development
- 1.8 The Strategy also noted the need for the development and implementation of Personal Development Planning, as follows:

'In line with the rest of the sector the University needs to have in place by 2004-05 a mechanism that will enable recording of student achievement in skills and personal development as well as in formal assessment.

A working group drawn from the Teaching and Learning Committee and including Faculty representation will undertake the development of schemes for Personal Development Planning.'

- 1.9 It is acknowledged that with the publication of the HEFCE E-Learning Strategy, and developments that have been made, and are possible, the Teaching Learning and Assessment Strategy will be updated this year to include a more important use of ICT to support learning. The School of Continuing Professional Development will take the pedagogical developments of this forward.
- 1.10 Both the HEFCE E-Learning Strategy and the QAA Code of Practice on Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning) emphasises the importance of an appropriate ICT infrastructure and support staff to ensure that maximum benefit can be gained by all parties in the use of ICT learning and teaching. In particular, the HEFCE E-Learning Strategy refers to the important work that will be done with ALT, SCONUL and UCISA* to support this strategy, and the link with the QAA to ensure that future audits examine and acknowledge this. The Head of Learning and Information Systems is the Chair of a newly formed tripartite group of ALT, SCONUL and UCISA, called the Trident Group, which has a focus on liaising with HEFCE and supporting members in this key area of work. She is also a member of the joint UCISA-SCONUL Advisory Group on Quality and this group works with the QAA to ensure two-way communication. The Department of Learning and Information Services and the Information Strategy Steering Group are in a good position to ensure support for e-learning is developed appropriately.
- 1.11 The Higher Education Academy Conference in June 2005 emphasised the benefits to be gained from the appropriate use of e-learning. The assumption made was that everyone was now actively engaging in blended learning and that institutions were embedding it by developing appropriate policies, such as that proposed here.

2 Policy

- 2.1 The Information Strategy Steering Group proposed that the Head of the School of Continuing Professional Education and the Head of Learning and Information Services develop a joint Policy on the Use of Blackboard at Buckinghamshire New University. The draft policy was discussed at Planning Board on 11 April 2005 and subsequently amended. The policy was welcomed, though it was acknowledged that there was need for staff development in the pedagogical issues concerned with blended learning**, particularly relating to the different ways in which it may be used in different modules. Members were also concerned with workload implications.
- 2.2 Senate discussed the policy on 29 April 2005 and suggested further amendments, which have been incorporated into this version of the policy.
- 2.3 This policy states that:
 - 2.3.1 The following information will be available for students through Blackboard, at a minimal level in all modules by the beginning of the academic year 2006-07:
 - a) Definitive course and module information, including programme specifications, module proforma, module scheme of work
 - b) Information regarding assessment
 - c) Lists of information resources, such as books, journals, databases, web sites
 - d) Information on staff availability
 - 2.3.2 Materials that are used to support module delivery will be made available routinely with Blackboard wherever possible.
 - 2.3.3 In validation and reviews from October 2005, all faculty, programme and module teaching, learning and assessment strategies will explicitly consider the way in which

Blackboard may or may not be used as appropriate for the nature of the work in the faculty, programme and module. This discussion should be noted in minutes of faculty teaching and learning committees, course development and course committee meetings or other group meetings as appropriate. It should include, as a minimum, ways in which web discussions and self-assessment will be used in conjunction with the course materials. All definitive documents will indicate the outcomes of such discussion. This will be a necessary requirement for a validation to be approved and will be monitored by AAC.

- 2.3.4 Faculties will be encouraged to utilise the facilities available in the Blackboard Content System to provide version control and appropriate user permissions at different times in the development cycle. Academic Quality Directorate will promote this to faculties.
- 2.3.5 Teaching and Learning Committee will be the main forum for sharing good practice in the use of ICT in teaching and learning. Those staff with the ability and interest to pursue more advanced and innovative ways of using Blackboard will be encouraged and this will be disseminated through Teaching and Learning Committee. SCPE will also seek to promote this and disseminate information through the CPD programme and the Dialogue newsletter.
- 2.3.6 Students will be provided with the opportunity to record their Personal Development Plans using the Blackboard e-portfolio facility in addition to any software used to help them develop these, such as the Students' Union MyPdp. Appropriate tutors will be trained to enable this. SCPE will support faculties in their provision of opportunities for personal development planning for students and progress will be monitored by Teaching and Learning Committee.
- 2.3.7 There is a growing body of experience in the sector regarding the submission of assessments via the Digital Drop Box. The QAA Code of Practice on Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning) expects appropriate security mechanisms to be applied for electronic submission, and makes reference to appropriate British Standards. The University will follow these up to improve the current disaster recovery / business continuity procedures to explicitly deal with this. This will typically require fallback procedures such as the use of hard copies and extensions for deadlines to cover such risks as power failure or corrupt files. This will be implemented by LIS and monitored through the Information Strategy Steering Group.
- 2.3.8 Staff will be provided with the opportunity to record their research interests using the Blackboard e-portfolio facility for easier dissemination to colleagues outside the University.
- 2.3.9 LIS will support staff in the provision of copyright clearance for digital materials from 1st August 2005, and will enable copyright-cleared digital resources to be made available within appropriate modules via the Blackboard E-reserves facility.
- 2.3.10 Organisations will be set up in Blackboard to cover both the management structure and committee structure so that access to all appropriate documents can be made and web discussion can be undertaken about them where necessary. This will also facilitate easy access to committee papers electronically as an alternative to the paper format. LIS will provide appropriate infrastructure so that committee members will be able to access the virtual papers at the committee via laptops and the internet, using a wireless network.

*ALT Association of Learning Technology, SCONUL Society of College, National and University Libraries, UCISA Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association.

**Blended learning is a combination of face-to-face learning and remote learning using software such as Blackboard.

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