Blackboard Collaborate Report

The University implemented the web conferencing tool, Blackboard Collaborate, in Nov 2015, initially for a year with a view to possible further investment. This report summarises the evaluation of it. Working closely with Blackboard we outlined a number of Use cases, mapping the potential benefits against the university aims. The Use cases listed below were asked to consider; Pedagogical Need, Training Requirements, Support Requirements, Student Impact, Institutional Impact and Repeatability and included:

- Doctoral Supervision
- Assessment and Award boards
- Early Research Methods Awareness
- Student Induction/Briefing

The success of implementing these use cases was varied, however the lessons learned were invaluable. Detail of this can be found in the Blackboard Collaborate report made by the Blackboard Consultant Lloyd St lokhere.

The team asked for interested parties and a list “of Early adopters” from all the faculties and a number of the Services was drawn up. These people were targeted and offered training. These are the staff that provided the Use cases.

The training consisted of 2 parts

1. Face-to-face 15 min session to check pc, headsets, webcams etc
2. Online 1 hour session using Collaborate

After the early adopters, training was offered to other staff in the university. The take-up was as follows:

- ACT: 6 (+ 2 course teams)
- BEL: 12
- CES: 23 (this includes 13 self-trained)
- HS: 13
- Other: 7

There are 2 versions of Collaborate available, Classic and Ultra. Due to limitations in the functionality of Blackboard Ultra, during the academic year 2015/16 we used the Classic version within Blackboard Modules and “Ultra” for Collaborate sessions outside Blackboard.

However as the technology has been developed over the year, we have changed the default to “Ultra” for all sessions as the interface is easier to use and it uses a browser, and so requires no additional software to be installed on individual PCs.

It is now possible to:

- Host a session with up to 100 participants
- Record a session
• Share Documents
• Pre-load documents/powerpoints etc
• Access Blackboard Collaborate through the Mobile App

Currently we cannot obtain data about the use of Collaborate through Modules, however, the number of sessions than ran outside Blackboard and booked through 3800 were 61:

• ACT: 2
• BEL: 7
• CES: 9
• HS: 20
• Other: 23

The comparatively high number of sessions booked by staff other than in the faculties indicate that these sessions were largely held as meetings and to enable university business to run rather than for academic purposes.

We have asked for feedback from all staff who were trained or showed interest during Sept-Dec 2015. The staff were asked the following questions and 20 of the 40 responded:

Did you receive training on using Collaborate?
1. Face to face with a member of staff from the TEL or IS team 56%
2. Online with a member of staff from the TEL or IS team 19%
3. Accessed the help guides on Blackboard 6%
4. Accessed the online videos on Blackboard 0%
5. A colleague helped me 6%
6. I did not need training 19%
7. Other, please comment 6%

Approximately how many times did you use Collaborate with your students?
1. 5+ 18%
2. 2-5 18%
3. 1 18%
4. I did not use Collaborate with my students 47%

Which tools/features did you use?
1. Uploading PPT 75%
2. Application sharing 38%
3. Video sharing 38%
4. Poll/quiz 38%
Using Blackboard Collaborate

In responses to the question of use of Collaborate most respondents agreed that it:

- enabled me to deliver a teaching session I wouldn't otherwise have been able to do
- enabled me to engage students who were otherwise unable to attend face-to-face
- was easy for me
- was well supported by TEL and/or IS Staff

but were less happy to agree that it:

- offered an opportunity to develop my students' digital skills
- enabled me to enhance the learning experience by involving external speakers
- enabled me to easily demonstrate a tool or software
- was easy for my students

Please add any further comments about your experience of using Collaborate this academic year

- "It is now essential to my work as I have built a learning process around it”
- “I have attempted to use Collaborate with colleagues for team meetings, but had difficulty getting them to engage. Those who did found the login process quite onerous and I think faculty would need training in this to ensure that everyone engages with the software”
- “When working with students who were based abroad with low bandwidth, I had to revert to Skype because the Collaborate Ultra was not operating smoothly enough.”

Points of interest

The following points of interest and recommendations have emerged from the tests and feedback:

- Lack of hardware, headsets etc:
  - Cited as a reason staff were reluctant to adopt Collaborate
  - Connecting with partners, (an Ask the Expert session), through a VGA cable (from a iMac air) to projector meant that the display was distorted
- Blackboard Collaborate can now be used via the BB Student App

Next Steps

- The need to identify key areas for potential use and expansion: Generic use cases like meetings, online training, fixing problems
- Recommendations/guidelines to be made available for use based on lessons learned
• A requirement to simplify the processes to use Collaborate outside Blackboard modules
• To re-publicise or launch as we have continued our investment on the Blackboard Collaborate Web Conferencing tool.