



Compendium of Augmented Blended Teaching & Learning for Open Pedagogic Tools

Blended Learning Tool Evaluation - Blackboard

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1. Introduction

Blackboard is leading EdTech company and a popular and widely used collaborative learning platform in many of the HEIs who participated in this research. For HEIs using the platform, Blackboard can be accessed through the school or university website. Blackboard also has a mobile app which many HEIs reported as popular amongst students and teachers. The platform is primarily used for teaching and storing module content such as documents and other files. It can also be used for examinations, setting quizzes, as a chatroom function and student interaction in a variety of other virtual learning spaces. In addition, there are multiple plug-ins available, one of the most popular being Blackboard Collaborate Ultra which allows virtual classrooms to be established for teaching. Blackboard is currently one of the most well established collaborative learning platforms and is used by many schools, universities and other organisations worldwide.



Blackboard

Blackboard as accessed through the South East Technological University main website

The screenshot shows the South East Technological University (SETU) website. At the top left is the SETU logo with the text 'Office of Technological Innovation and Entrepreneurship, South East Technological University'. To the right are social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Instagram, along with a search bar. Further right are links for 'Staff Portal', 'Staff Vacancies', 'Student Portal', 'Library', 'Career Service', and 'Contact Us'. Below this is a navigation menu with 'Home', 'Courses', 'Study', 'Student Information', 'International', 'Research', and 'Industry & Innovation'. The main content area is titled 'Resources' and lists various services like 'Research and Innovation IMPACT Strategic Plan 2020-2025', 'Alumni at Institute of Technology Carlow', 'Institute of Technology Carlow - Celebrating 50 Years', 'Communications', and 'Computing Services'. A 'Staff' section is highlighted, listing services such as 'Banner - Web for Faculty', 'Blackboard', 'Classroom Technology', 'CORE Portal', 'Eduroam', 'Email', 'HEANET File Sender', 'HEANET Media Server', 'MFA (Multi-Factor Authentication)', 'Microsoft OneDrive', 'Password', 'Printing', 'Virtual Desktop', 'Service Catalogue', 'Students', 'Contact Us', 'Data-Protection', and 'Equality, Diversity & Inclusivity'. The 'Blackboard' section is expanded, showing a description: 'Blackboard is IT Carlow's e-learning platform used by Academic staff to:' followed by a list of features:

- Post and distribute course content such as syllabuses and course notes.
- Communicate with students via announcements, email messages and discussion boards.
- Create Wikis, a place for students to collaboratively create online projects.
- Assign Journals, designed to be a self-reflective tool for students, which is often used for students on work placement.
- Groups, lecturers can create groups of students and provide them with their own tools for collaborative work.
- Assess student learning through quizzes, online assignments and Turnitin, which is an originality checking and plagiarism prevention service.
- Blackboard Collaborate provides a Virtual Classroom, Chat facility and Synchronous communication tools.

 Below this, it states: 'Once you have been issued with your IT Carlow computer network account you will have access to Blackboard. However whilst students have automatic access to the courses they are registered for, staff must request access to courses they are teaching by completing the Course Enrolment form available in the Blackboard Support course.' A 'Blackboard Requests:' section follows, with the instruction: 'Click on the link below to submit your request.' and a link: 'Blackboard Help/Request Page(Login required)'. At the bottom of this section is another list:

- Blackboard course Enrolment form
- Common course Request form
- Current Blackboard Courses

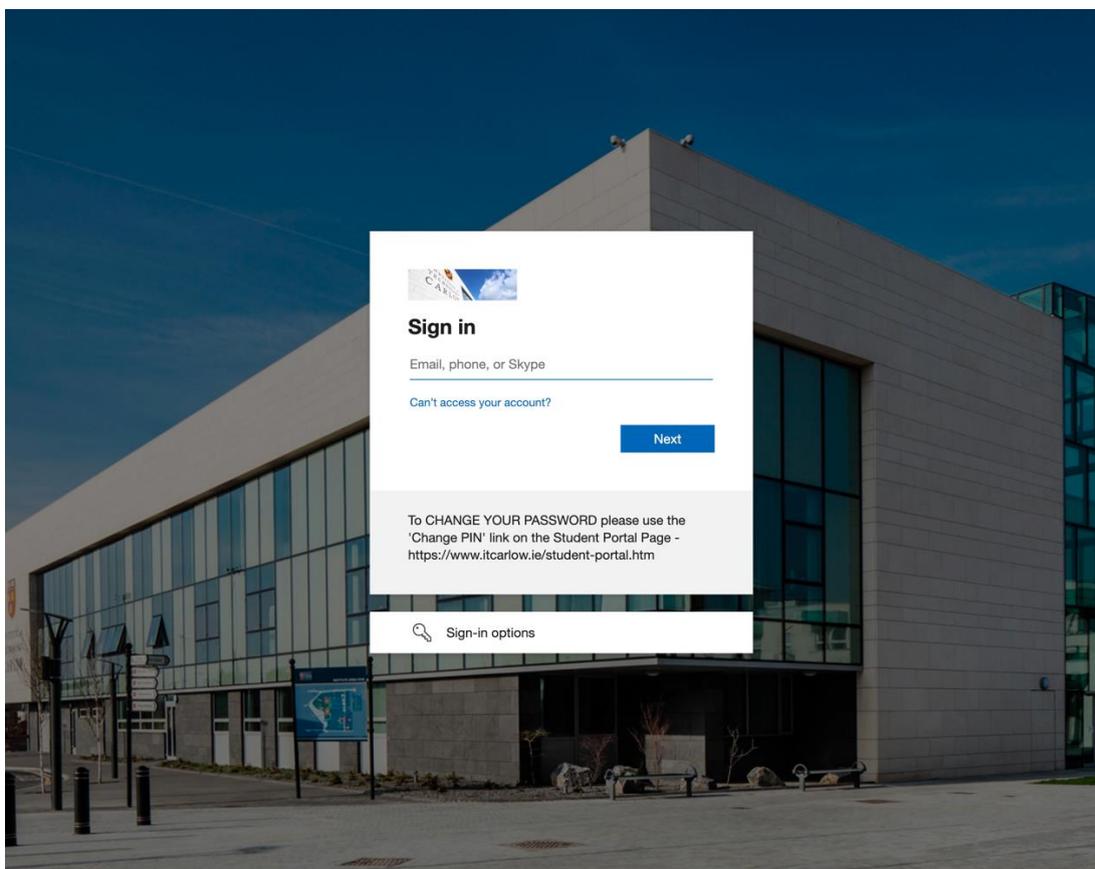


2. Testing and evaluation of the tool

As mentioned in the previous section, Blackboard is one of the most popular and widely used learning platforms amongst the HEIs we spoke with as part of the ACADFIGIA Project. The platform is used worldwide, with Blackboard experiencing an increased user base since many educational institutions resorted to fully online and blended learning because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Blackboard is primarily used by HEIs but also has a user base in the industry and other organisations that are interested in teaching, learning, and training. The platform has an extremely rich feature set including:

- Storage of all class materials (documents, links, videos) organised in a modular fashion by class or module.
- Many plug-ins for conducting classes, lectures, and tutorials. One example of a frequently used plug-in is Blackboard Collaborate Ultra.
- The ability for the teacher to create exams, assessments, and quizzes, as well as many other means of student assessment.
- Supporting student activities including meetings, breakout rooms, exams and assignments, and a wide variety of other collaborative work.
- Other tools such as attendance reporting and student tracking.
- Zoom Webinar allows professional level webinars to be organised and held. Integration with Eventbrite, PayPal and other platforms is possible. Live streaming through Zoom Webinar on Facebook and YouTube is also possible.
- Zoom facilitates communication channels and discussion forums. This also includes direct messaging, real-time chats, audio-video conferencing, and various reactions using emoji.

Blackboard login screen





Blackboard example of home screen when logged in

The screenshot shows the Blackboard home interface for a user logged in at South East Technological University (SETU). At the top left is the SETU logo with the text 'Ollscoil Technolaíochta an Oirthuaiscirt' and 'South East Technological University'. Below the logo is a navigation bar with 'Home' and 'Notifications Dashboard' tabs. The main content area is divided into three sections:

- My Announcements:** A header section containing the text 'No Institution Announcements have been posted in the last 7 days.' Below this is a link to '[TLC Staff Hub]' and a list of two announcements: 'Join our next book club on Teaching, Learning and Assessment: "How to Get Your PhD: A Handbook for the Journey"' and 'ILTA Seminar Series: Co-Designing Web Accessibility Solutions with People with Cognitive Disabilities'. A 'more announcements...' link is at the bottom right of this section.
- Tools:** A list of utility links including 'Microsoft Office 365', 'Microsoft OneDrive', 'Blackboard Course Requests (Staff Only)', 'Announcements', 'My Marks', 'Calendar', 'Tasks', 'Personal Information', and 'Application Authorization'.
- Help for Students:** A list of links for student support: 'Visit Blackboard Help for students', 'Learn about the Blackboard app', 'Watch helpful how-to videos for students', and 'TLC Student Hub - Blackboard Support'.
- Help for Staff:** A list of links for staff support: 'Visit Blackboard Help for instructors', 'Learn about the Blackboard Instructor app', 'Watch helpful how-to videos for instructors', and 'TLC Staff Hub - Blackboard Support'.

Once the student or teacher logs into Blackboard the screen above will be seen. This is the home screen which shows announcements, 'help' for a variety of problems, and there may also be a link to staff or student hubs. The Blackboard home screen will also show any courses the student or teacher is registered to take.



3. Functionalities supporting blended learning

Blackboard has a large variety of functionality which supports blended learning. This is now discussed in the following sub-sections.

3.1. Supporting Professional Engagement

Blackboard supports professional engagement in a wide variety of ways. The interface and multiple other tools clearly show the modules and the material available to the student. As can be seen from the figure below, Blackboard has a clean and clear interface which links to the modules and a variety of other useful services for the student. These include links to download the mobile app, a link to the Google search engine, past paper repositories, library services, a test course for teachers, and links to staff and student hubs.

Zoom home page for staff and students

My Courses

Courses where you are: Instructor

.....

[Test-Course](#)

Courses where you are: Student

Blended Learning

****Computing Services****

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Library Services

Past Exam Papers Repository

[TLC Staff Hub](#)

Announcements:

- > [Join our next book club on Teaching, Learning and Assessment: "How to Get Your PhD: A Handbook for the Journey"](#)
- > [ILTA Seminar Series: Co-Designing Web Accessibility Solutions with People with Cognitive Disabilities](#)

[TLC Student Hub](#)

Search the Web

Download Blackboard's Student App Today

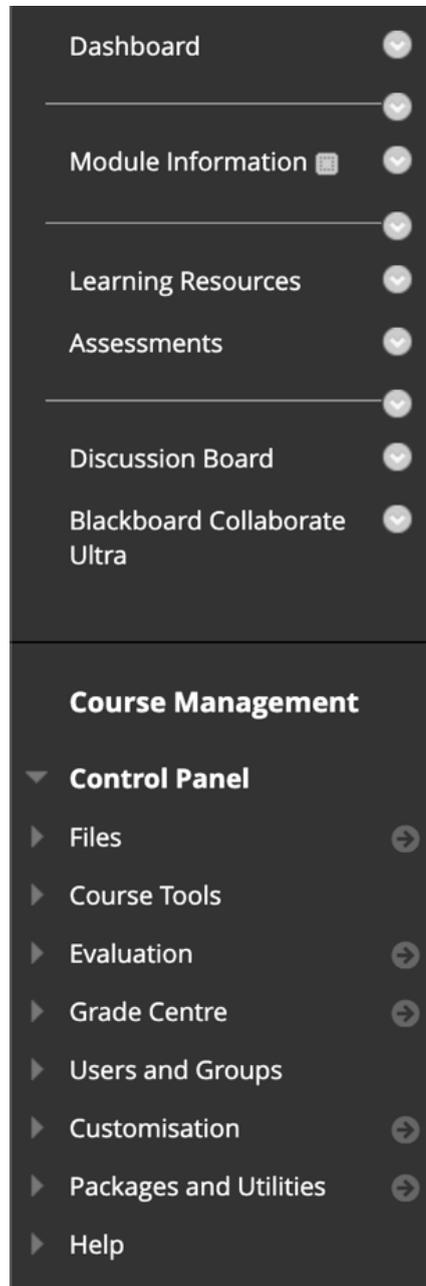
Access marks, course content and more from the Blackboard app on your mobile device. Available on iOS and Android.



3.2. Supporting Digital Resources

Blackboard also supports a wide variety of digital resources for teaching and learning. This is mainly in the form of the dashboard for each module as shown in the figure below.

Blackboard digital 'Dashboard' for each module



The dashboard gives links specific for each module for assessments, learning resources, and help. The link to 'learning resources' is shown below where it can be seen there is a variety of material for instructions on how to use MS Project including links to documents that can be downloaded. There is also a link to a folder containing lecture slides and other materials for that particular module.

P1

VM Ware Instructions for MS Project

Availability: Item is hidden from students.
 Enabled: Statistics Tracking

Attached Files: ITC VM Instructions how to download.pdf (721.01 KB)
 ITC VM Instructions postgrads.pdf (759.852 KB)

All

In relation to your VM Ware access to use MS Project please see the below additional instruction and attached documents

Thank you

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After they have entered their username and password
 On the main page they will need to configure SSL

Steps

Click on at the top left corner and select

- Configure SSL
- Select Do not verify server identity certificates

VMware Horizon Client SSL Configuration

Certificate checking mode:

This mode determines how the client proceeds when it can not verify that your connection to the server is secure. It is not recommended that you change this setting unless instructed to do so by your system administrator.

Never connect to untrusted servers
 Warn before connecting to untrusted servers
 Do not verify server identity certificates

OK Cancel

Click OK

Lecture Slides

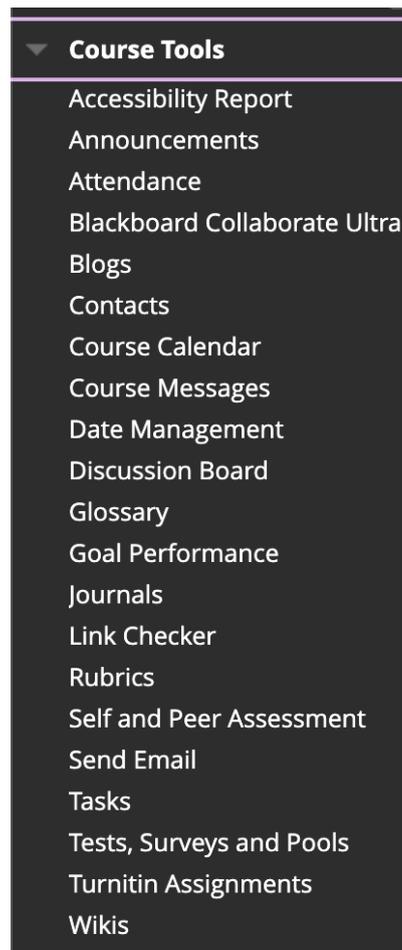
3.3. Supporting Teaching & Learning
 Blackboard is also effective at supporting teaching, learning and assessment.

Course Management

- ▼ **Control Panel**
 - ▶ Files
 - ▶ Course Tools
- ▼ **Evaluation**
 - Course Reports
 - Performance Dashboard
 - Retention Centre
 - SCORM Reports
- ▼ **Grade Centre**
 - Needs Marking
 - Full Grade Centre
 - Assignments
 - Tests
- ▼ **Users and Groups**
 - Groups
 - Users
- ▶ Customisation
- ▶ Packages and Utilities
- ▶ Help

The figure above shows how Blackboard manages 'Evaluation', 'Grade Centre', and 'Users & Groups'. This is where the teacher can correct assessments submitted through Blackboard. Marking management is facilitated as it can be easily seen what 'needs marking' and what is fully corrected and marked. In addition, a plug-in is available for TurnItIn which is a widely used plagiarism checker. HEIs using Blackboard reported they used these features extensively.

In addition, HEIs reported that the 'course tools' section of Blackboard was used extensively and this is where many of the most popular plug-ins were to be found - e.g. Blackboard Collaborate Ultra, TurnItIn - as well as other rubrics and the ability to send email directly to students.



Overall, although the platform was widely used Blackboard did have its critics amongst the HEIs we spoke with as part of this research. Some thought the platform was too big and unwieldy, whilst others stated the platform was expensive, proprietary, and required a high level of technical expertise to setup and maintain. Despite this, almost all HEIs expressed the belief that Blackboard was invaluable as a collaborative teaching, learning and assessment tool, and that it helped them teach and assess their students more effectively.

4. Tutorial Video and PowerPoint slides

The ACADIGIA resources for Blackboard are available on the website [here](#).

A wide range of resources are available to support the use of Blackboard. These include the [Blackboard website](#) and [Blackboard help forums](#).