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University of London

Bloomsbury Learning Environment Annual Report 2014-15



February 2016

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1. Executive Summary

The BLE Annual Report 2014-15 documents the continued development and activities of the Bloomsbury Learning Environment (BLE) Service during the academic year (1st August 2014 - 31st July 2015). The BLE encompasses a number of shared software licences, which support learning, teaching and research across the participating Colleges. The BLE also serves to coordinate the sharing of good practice in the support and deployment of e-learning and Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) between and within the Colleges. The Colleges make use of a number of complementary tools and technologies, which are referred to in the report. In addition, a number of BLE-managed events and meetings were organised for the Colleges during the year, which are also documented within this paper.

2. Background

2.1 Partners

The BLE was originally established as a shared Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) in 2004 by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), the Royal Veterinary College (RVC) and the School of Oriental & African Studies (SOAS). The Institute of Education (now UCL Institute of Education) joined the partnership in 2005 followed by Birkbeck in 2007. The London International Development Centre (LIDC) also benefits from the shared activities offered by the BLE.

On 2nd December 2014, the Institute of Education merged with UCL. This however did not affect the IOE's partnership with the BLE during 2014-15 or for the foreseeable future.

During the year 2014-15, the BLE began to work more closely with TEL colleagues at the University of London, specifically SAS (the School of Advanced Studies) and UoLIA (the University of London International Academy) with a view to the University becoming a full BLE partner in 2015-16. By expanding the collaboration, it was felt that the BLE will not only be able to share and gain additional expertise but will also benefit from the increased corporate and financial security and stability in an ever-changing landscape.

2.2 The Service

For over 10 years, the BLE Service has grown and developed not only to enable the partners to profit from cost savings of joint licences but to enhance e-learning practices by sharing and coordinating technical and pedagogical expertise. Working together as a consortium enables the Colleges to develop training materials and provide shared expertise and support that they might otherwise be unable to offer individually.

The BLE portfolio of shared technologies includes the following:

- I. Moodle (Virtual Learning Environment)
- II. Learning Objects (a third-party provider of various web 2.0 tools including blogs and wikis)
- III. Blackboard Collaborate (web conferencing software)
- IV. Lecture capture software (Echo360 and Panopto)
- V. Turnitin (online plagiarism detection software)
- VI. Bloomsbury Media Cloud (digital media repository).

All of these technologies complement and integrate with Moodle, although some Colleges have opted to use them as stand-alone tools.

A number of BLE Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) events and special interest groups are organised for the Colleges to facilitate the sharing of good practice, staff development and support of technological tools.

2.3 Staffing

2.3.1 BLE Service Manager

The BLE is centrally staffed by a full-time Service Manager, who is employed jointly by the Colleges to coordinate the BLE Service. The BLE Service Manager, Sarah Sherman, holds overall responsibility for the coordination, implementation and development of the BLE Service. She is also involved in the development of e-learning within all Colleges, and regularly meets with their respective e-learning and TEL teams.

The Service Manager also attends meetings of the Bloomsbury Heads of Colleges and Administration, as well as the Bloomsbury Colleges' Library, Staff Development and IT Managers' meetings to provide updates about BLE activities. The Service Manager is also involved in a number of University of London activities (see 7.2).

The BLE Service Manager coordinates the Moodle User Group for Greater London (MUGGL), which meets once a term at a London institution; further information at www.tinyurl.com/muggl. She also chairs the termly ULCC Moodle Users Group - a client group; further information at <http://ulcc.ac.uk/event/moodle-user-group-spring-2015>. In addition, the Service Manager represents the Bloomsbury Colleges at the termly Heads of e-Learning Forum (HeLF) and is a Trustee of the Association for Learning Technology (ALT).

2.3.2 BLE Technical Team

The staff that manage and support the day-to-day implementation of learning technologies within the individual Colleges collectively form the BLE Technical Team. On a regular, termly basis, the BLE Technical Team meets to troubleshoot and share technical developments, and arrange upgrades. The members work together on mutually beneficial e-learning projects as well as supporting and advising on each other's provisions. The meetings are chaired by the BLE Service Manager. See Appendix for the Group's membership.

2.3.3 BLE Steering Group

The BLE Steering Group comprises representation from each of the participating Colleges and the BLE Service Manager. It is chaired by the Head of Electronic Media at the RVC and is supported by the BLE Service Manager. The Steering Group, which manages the strategic drive of the collaboration, meets on a termly basis to discuss the plans and implementation of the BLE; it reports to the Bloomsbury Heads of Administration. See Appendix for the Group's membership.

3. The BLE portfolio of tools and technologies

The BLE Colleges share licences for a number of complementary tools that integrate with Moodle, but can also be used standalone. The following section describes the general use of these.

3.1 Moodle

2014-15 marked the third academic year of using Moodle, the most essential and core technology in the BLE portfolio of e-learning platforms. Each College has its own instance of Moodle, ensuring an equitable service and providing substantial room for growth; an online area exists for every course taught across the Colleges.

A sixth Moodle instance, known as the BLE Hub, provides a shared space for joint courses and collaborative activity. For example, a dedicated online and password-protected space for LIDC members; a place for the Bloomsbury careers advisers to share and maintain online resources and a shared course for the development of study skills across Bloomsbury.

The six Moodle sites are hosted externally by ULCC (the University of London Computer Centre), which frees up dependency on infrastructures and technical support within the Colleges' IT departments. ULCC has also worked with the Colleges to provide a number of bespoke, paid-for developments. For example, as part of a Jisc grant, the IOE arranged for the modification of the ULCC assessment dashboard to collate feedback for individual students. Also, the RVC has been working with ULCC and a number of other hosted institutions to develop the Online Coursework Management plugin to enable online blind and double-blind marking (amongst other functions). Finally, ULCC developed an integration for SOAS between Moodle and their student record system (SRS) so that grades are automatically synced from one into the other, and that assignments created in the SRS are automatically added in the appropriate Moodle course.

UCL IOE migrated all courses to UCL Moodle in July 2015, with the plan to close down the IOE instance at the end of 2015–16. UCL IOE will however continue using the BLE Hub.

The BLE Service Manager conducts monthly meetings with ULCC's helpdesk manager to ensure all support queries raised by the Colleges are on track to being solved and that the systems were running optimally. This regular contact ensures good communications and provides a greater accountability for ULCC. The fact that the BLE Service Manager also chairs the ULCC Moodle Users Group is very beneficial for the consortium as issues high on the BLE agenda can be addressed and improved for ULCC's entire customer base.

3.2 Learning Objects' Campus Pack Suite

The Colleges have been sharing a license for Learning Objects' Campus Pack suite since May 2007; the suite includes wikis, journals, blogs and podcasts. The tools are used widespread across Birkbeck, UCL IOE, LSHTM and SOAS. At the end of 2014-15, the UCL IOE moved to the UCL licence for Campus Pack.

3.3 Blackboard Collaborate

The Bloomsbury Colleges have shared a licence for Blackboard Collaborate (web-based classroom software, formerly known as Elluminate) since 2007-8. This was initially used by the RVC and the IOE, but since 2009-10, all Colleges have been using the application in some way, whether integrated into Moodle or as a standalone tool. At the end of 2014-15, IOE moved to the UCL licence for Blackboard Collaborate.

Led by a Learning Technology Fellow at the UCL IOE and supported by the BLE Service Manager, a needs analysis investigation and review of alternative web-conferencing platforms was conducted in 2014-15. The review was carried out with the additional input from the BLE Web-Conferencing Working Group. The conclusion of the review was that the emerging update of Blackboard Collaborate, known as "Ultra", was a move in the right direction. The Colleges decided independently to renew the licence for a 12 month period (1st November 2015 - 31st October 2016), with an option to extend the licence agreement for a further two years at a rate negotiated by the BLE Service Manager. A copy of the report is available upon request.

3.4 Lecture Capture

Licences for lecture capture software are managed internally by Birkbeck, LSHTM, the RVC and SOAS, but they benefit from a 15% BLE discount, arranged and managed the BLE Service Manager.

The RVC has been using Echo360 since 2009-10; in 2014-15, SOAS, LSHTM and Birkbeck officially rolled out Panopto. To support these implementations, the Service Manager is in regularly contact with the suppliers and arranges meetings for staff in the Colleges to meet with each other and the suppliers' Account and Technical Managers.

3.5 Turnitin

Turnitin is the online plagiarism detection tool, which integrates with the VLE. The BLE Colleges manage their licences independently, but are supported by the Service Manager who liaises with Turnitin staff over upgrades and support issues. Turnitin is embedded into Moodle, from where the majority of users access it.

3.6 Bloomsbury Media Cloud

The Bloomsbury Media Cloud is a shared digital media repository used for storing, managing and distributing video and audio files, used by various different stakeholder groups across the Colleges including learning technologists, librarians, marketing, communications and external relations staff. The Media Cloud is integrated into Moodle - a development that was heavily supported by BLE colleagues working with the platform supplier, MediaCore. The integration allows academic staff to upload and use content securely and privately from within their Moodle course, ensuring that content is only accessible to students enrolled in these courses.

4. BLE Project 2014-15

For the first time, the BLE took a project-based approach to its activity in 2014-15, focusing on the way online assessment and feedback is managed across the Colleges. The purpose of the project was to identify and share good and innovative practice, with the aim of improving online assessment and feedback processes, practices, opportunities and technologies available to the partner Colleges.

The three key aims and objectives of this project are:

1. to identify various stakeholders and their expectations/goals in the deployment and use of e-assessment and feedback in Bloomsbury.
2. to assess and evaluate appropriate technologies to support e-assessment across the Bloomsbury Colleges.
3. to produce documentation, case studies and organise events for academic and support staff.

A team of advisers from all BLE partners was established to support and shape the direction of the project. Membership of the team is listed in the Appendix.

The main outputs of the project have been a series of events and documentation, including case studies describing good practice. All outputs are available via the project website www.bloomsbury.ac.uk/assessment. The full project report can be viewed online here: <http://moodle.ble.ac.uk/mod/url/view.php?id=3891>

5. Other projects

5.1 BLE CMALT Cohort

A cohort was convened of staff members wishing to work towards gaining Certified Membership of the Association for Learning Technology (CMALT). The BLE cohort of 19 candidates, representing all BLE partner institutions, was the largest cohort in the UK at the time, comprising of learning technologists, library staff and academics. The BLE Service Manager arranged monthly meetings, where candidates came together with representatives from ALT to work through their portfolio. A course site in Moodle was set up to host materials for candidates and to house virtual meetings. Due to the success of the 2014-15 cohort and interest from staff members who did not join the cohort, the project will be repeated in 2015-16.

5.2 BLOOC On Demand

The BLOOC (Bloomsbury Online Course), offered to all Colleges in the summer of 2013-14, was designed to improve the pedagogical use of Moodle by Bloomsbury staff. Open to all teaching staff, the four week long course modelled good practice in teaching and learning with technology,

showcasing innovative examples of use from all Colleges, and developed a community of practice amongst Bloomsbury academics.

Due to the success of the course, which attracted 230 participants, the BLOOC was redesigned as an On Demand course during 2014-15 where each of the four weeks was converted into four separate topics: multimedia, wikis and blogs, running synchronous teaching sessions and quizzes. The BLOOC-OD will be launched as a fully-open course to the public in 2015-16.

5.3 Bloomsbury Media Lab

The Bloomsbury Media Lab was established in 2013 to create a database of media experts who are available to work for the Bloomsbury Colleges on preferential terms. To date, this has included support for photography, filming and podcasting. During 2014-15, the service continued to be used by the BLE partners to supplement their internal staff resources; for example, the production of MOOC videos at LSHTM. New for this year was the addition of a number of TEL consultants, who can be deployed at the Colleges to support additional projects; for example a learning technologist has been working at the RVC on a funded-project. External consultants are assessed by the BLE Service Manager and preferential rates for the partner Colleges have been negotiated. Further details can be viewed at www.bloomsbury.ac.uk/lab.

6. BLE Meetings and Events 2014-15

Activity	Date/Frequency	Registrations	Attendees
RVC AGM	18th December 2014	n/a	15
BLE Panopto meeting	5th February 2015	n/a	10
Peer Assessment Workshop	17th April 2015	19	14
Assessment Literacy Workshop	28th April 2015	n/a	12
Xerte Workshop	12th May 2015	43	31
Admin Summit	14th May 2015	115	77
Lynda.com demonstration	15th May 2015	n/a	12
CMALT seminars	Monthly	n/a	n/a
BLE Tech Team meetings	Quarterly	n/a	n/a
BLE Steering Group meetings	Termly	n/a	n/a
BLE Project Team meetings	Monthly	n/a	n/a

7. BLE Promotional Activities 2014-15

7.1 Internal Activities

The BLE-Announcements mailing list, which is used to update the Bloomsbury community about e-learning activities in London and beyond, currently contains over 500 subscribers from across the Colleges. The BLE's external website suffered from a lack of update during 2014-15, which will be rectified in 2015-16.

The BLE Blog <http://blenewsblog.blogspot.co.uk> continued to be updated by members of the BLE Technical team, who posted articles, materials, training guides, etc. The blog serves to share and

aggregate TEL practice from across the Colleges; duplicating posts that might be placed elsewhere will increase exposure and searchability.

7.2 Engaging outside Bloomsbury

To promote the work and collaboration of the BLE outside of Bloomsbury, a range of activities were carried out during 2014-15. These included presentations delivered by members of the BLE Technical Team at a number of conferences and events - for example, at the M25 Learning Technology Group, MUGGL and ULCC Moodle Users Group meetings and at ALT-C.

The BLE Service Manager maintained strong links with Jisc and the Association for Learning Technology (ALT) including being a member of the Jisc Co-Design and Digital Capabilities Steering Groups and Trustee of ALT. In October 2014, she was invited to chair panel sessions at the FOTE Conference (regarding the role of women in technology) and at the Panopto Conference (regarding institutional usage of lecture capture software). On 2nd July 2015, Sarah was invited to provide evidence at an inquiry hosted at the House of Lords into the use of data in HE.

The BLE Service Manager has established and maintained collaborative working relationships with other institutions. For example, at the University of London, she is a member of the University of London's International Academy's (UoLIA) systems and technology sub-committee, panellist on UoLIA's MOOC review board and member of the User Experience Working Group.

8. Planned Activities & Events for 2015-16

The project-based focus of assessment and feedback will continue into 2015-16, providing suitable time to pull together all remaining case studies, project documentation and arranging events. A new focus for 2016-17 will be identified and scoped. The 2015-16 project plan is as follows:

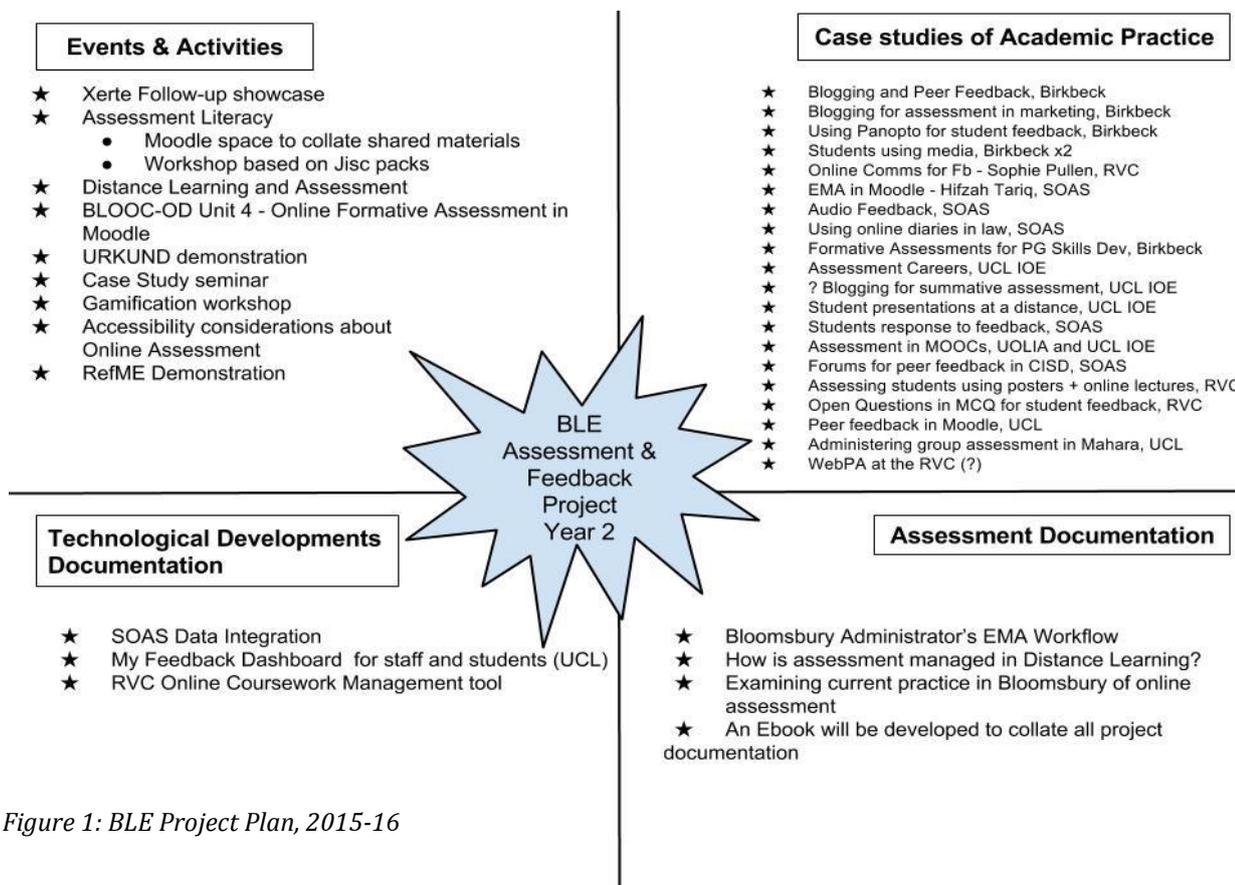


Figure 1: BLE Project Plan, 2015-16

Appendix

BLE Memberships 2014-15

Membership of Steering Group:

Nick Short (RVC) (Chair), Sarah Sherman (BLE) (Secretary) , Jas Gill (BBK), Hilary Sellars (IOE), Craig Higgins/Jon Faulkner (LSHTM), Simon Rofe (SOAS).

Membership of Technical Group:

Sarah Sherman (BLE), Leo Havemann (BBK), Peter Leffek (BBK), Ali Parvin (BBK), Kit Logan (UCL IOE), Tim Neumann (UCL IOE), Paul Thompson (UCL IOE), Eileen Kennedy (UCL IOE), Jo Stroud (LSHTM), Anu Laitakari (LSHTM), Ben Audsley (RVC), Alistair Spark (RVC), Linda O'Sullivan (SOAS), Sultan Wadud (SOAS)

Membership of the Project Team:

Sarah Sherman (BLE) (Project Manager), Deborah Grange (Birkbeck), Leo Havemann (Birkbeck), Lorraine Locke (LSHTM), Tim Neumann (UCL Institute of Education), Sonya Powney (RVC), Holly Smith (UCL Institute of Education), Jo Stroud (LSHTM), Heidi Ward (SOAS)