

# THE MANCHESTER LEARNING ENVIRONMENT PROJECT

## Highlights: The MLE Project incorporating Blackboard Learn v9.1



## Blackboard 9 goes live!

The University's upgraded learning management system, Blackboard 9 (BB9), went live with the first 13 pilot courses for around 2500 students at the start of the semester. The configuration of the new system, along with a new and improved integration with Campus Solutions, has been carried out over the summer.

Users of BB9 will see a new and improved integration with existing staff and student portals. After just a single log-in, users will be presented with a portal screen that contains programme and course information specifically tailored to the individual user. Staff and students will see a complete list of their courses and need only click on a course to be taken to the correct Blackboard environment. During the coming year, all courses will be progressively migrated from the current Blackboard environment into the new and improved BB9. Users need only click on a course title in their portal to be automatically directed to the correct environment.

Staff involved in the pilots have commented on how much easier and more intuitive the BB9 interface is to use, and how much quicker and responsive the new environment is. Dr Antony Roberts, Director of Undergraduate Education, in the

School of Dentistry, said "Since my involvement with the project, it quickly became apparent that this will transform the delivery of our undergraduate programmes. The transition from the existing Blackboard has been painless and we envisage that our new online material will be an invaluable resource for our students with an array of technologically engaging material that will assist our delivery of a highly practical clinical discipline. Don't be shy.....this is definitely the way forward!"

The staff and students that are part of the pilot will be asked to provide feedback on their experiences of using the new environment at the end of Semester 1. This feedback will be used to inform the next phase of the system's development and throughout the remainder of the Project.



## Phase 2

The second phase of the MLE Project will commence in October with the identification of course units to go live in BB9 in Semester 2. The Project Implementation Team will work closely with Schools and Faculties to identify suitable candidates, so please feel free to volunteer. If you are interested in getting involved then let us know by contacting Kim Comer, Strategic Projects Officer in TLSO ([kim.comer@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:kim.comer@manchester.ac.uk)). It is expected that these course units will serve as models of how to develop innovative online course content and learning activities that improve the student experience, their motivation and engagement; helping to address areas of strategic importance to the University and its teaching and learning mission.

Specialist support will be available to support the transition process and to assist with course design and training. Roadshows will also be organised in Schools to demonstrate BB9 and explore ideas and suggestions as to how the new Blackboard system can help Schools to achieve their teaching and learning goals.

This phase will also include the development of a framework for the University-wide migration of courses from Blackboard Vista 8 to Blackboard 9. The new Blackboard environment will become available to all staff from early next year (the exact date to be announced in due course). As there are approximately 4,500 courses to migrate, the MLE Project Team will work with Schools on the plans for the migration of courses to ensure that this is done efficiently and with a minimum of disruption.

## Blackboard Training and Support

Since May 2010, 11 BB9 training sessions have taken place, including System Administration Training, User Essentials training and Exemplary Course Design. Over 80 members of teaching, administrative and learning technology staff have now received training in the new Blackboard 9.1 environment. The workshops have been very well received by staff who have found the courses informative and stimulating. Moyra James, VLE Support Officer in MBS, stated "The Blackboard Essentials course was a useful day. It was a whistle-stop tour of Blackboard and was handled very well. I am a trainer by trade and have been to many mediocre events, but this wasn't one of them!"

As the BB9 interface is very intuitive and easy to use, intensive training in the new environment is unnecessary. However, training sessions will be organised throughout 2010 and 2011 for staff who would like to brush up on their eLearning skills. If you are interested in learning more about any upcoming training opportunities, please contact your local eLearning Team: [elearning@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:elearning@manchester.ac.uk)

Additional training material and online support is available from the Blackboard website:

- On-Demand Learning Center  
(<http://ondemand.blackboard.com/>)
- Ask Dr. C (<http://discussions.blackboard.com/>)
- Blackboard Connections  
(<http://connections.blackboard.com/pages/home>)

For further information on the MLE Project contact Kim Comer, Strategic Projects Officer in TLSO ([kim.comer@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:kim.comer@manchester.ac.uk) x58103).