

Blackboard & The University of Manchester



Embedding Blended Learning: Managing for Institutional Change

The infrastructure required for deploying and managing an enterprise teaching, learning, and assessment environment is mission critical for today's 21st Century Learning Institutions. The University of Manchester, a Blackboard client since 2003 recently made a strategic decision to adopt the Blackboard Managed HostingSM solution for its Blackboard Learn - VistaTM delivery.

This strategic decision reinforces the University's commitment to providing a reliable and scalable infrastructure to support its 40,000 students and staff. To further extend this commitment the University also engaged Blackboard Consulting ServicesSM to develop strategic, tactical and operational solutions that would embed the technology, but more importantly help establish a change process that would accelerate take-up and engage the academic community, allowing for sustainability and future growth.

The University of Manchester was formed in October 2004 from the coming together of The Victoria University of Manchester and UMIST, two of Britain's most distinguished universities, and is the largest single-site higher education institution in the UK. The University's history

is closely linked to Manchester's emergence as the world's first industrial city with roots dating back to 1824 with the formation of the Manchester Mechanics Institute the predecessor of UMIST. Later in 1851 The Victoria University of Manchester was founded as Owens College.

The University of Manchester aims to be one of the top 25 universities in the world and is committed to achieving this by 2015. (Please select here, [Manchester 2015](#) to review the University's strategic plan). A key component of its strategy is excellence in teaching and learning underpinned by innovation. Manchester recognised the importance of a reliable, integrated and flexible technical infrastructure to help deliver its Vision.



Quick Facts

- + Bb client since 2003
- + 40,000 students and staff
- + Largest single site higher education institution in UK
- + Rich heritage dating back more than 180 years
- + 22 Academic Schools
- + 500 different degree programmes



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Whilst Manchester was not new to e-Learning, deploying it within a managed hosting environment and leveraging the experience of Blackboard Consulting Services to assist with building a sustainable e-Learning strategy for the future was. The Blackboard Consulting Services engagement with the University of Manchester had two key strands: Project Planning and Project Implementation, which characterise a successful deployment of an enterprise e-Learning and managed hosting environment.

Project Planning

At the core of any successful deployment is a well developed road map that clearly defines for the University how to get from where they are today to where they want to be. To achieve this, Blackboard Consulting Services worked closely with the University's own project team and used the Project Planning Service, which focuses on detailed planning for the deployment bringing together constituencies from across the University with responsibility for delivering the initiative. The planning workshops consider key project work streams including project management, learning and teaching, training and support, content management and migration, communications, business processes and the technical build and integration with other systems. The output is a Project Definition Document which covers key issues in respect of the work streams, provides a detailed timeline, and considers project risks and important tasks along with tactical recommendations. The following primary activities and benefits were completed:

- Agreed the objectives, scope and overall timeline and phases for the project
- Determined how the project would be managed, identifying key participants in addition to resource requirements, constraints and risks

- Developed objectives for pilots, identifying and selecting them, and determining what needed to be done to progress them successfully
- Identified key integration requirements, when they needed to be progressed, and potential issues
- Determined how the migration to an enterprise solution would be progressed and how the academic community would be engaged for change
- Identified the key business processes necessary to support an institution-wide deployment and the efficiencies and opportunities arising from these
- Helped build a strong team with joint ownership, a shared understanding of the issues and a clear mandate to progress appropriate solutions

The outcome of the planning process was a clearly defined roadmap that provided the basis for a well managed, resourced and successful implementation.

Project Implementation

Following the planning process Manchester brought together a committed and appropriately empowered team from across the University to progress the implementation including the Executive Sponsor, Teaching and Learning Office, IT services, faculty representatives, and registry. Blackboard worked closely with the team to help deliver an effective solution over the course of 18 months. Blackboard Managed Hosting helped to deploy a robust and scalable hosted environment. The Blackboard Consulting Services group focused on assisting Manchester with project management and troubleshooting, integrations work and training.

Systems Integration

An e-Learning environment is only as scalable as the business processes that underpin it. Critical to these is the successful integration between Blackboard and the University's core systems, particularly the Student Information System (SIS). Developing an effective integration requires the engagement of constituents from across the University to thoroughly review internal business rules and processes. Blackboard worked with Manchester to progress this, refining and streamlining the business processes and developing a smooth integration.

The benefits were significant, specifically:

- More efficient administrative processes and procedures
- Increased data integrity and timeliness
- Greater clarity, understanding and ownership of the business processes and procedures
- Increased student satisfaction as they were on the right course at the right time and could easily change, and
- Less staff effort spent sorting out issues that were falling between the cracks

Training

Focused training ensures high adoption rates by equipping the academic and services staff with the knowledge and confidence required to effectively deploy their enterprise system at full capacity. Manchester drew on Blackboard's expertise to undertake administrative and user training to support them through their transition to an enterprise environment. Training focused on three key areas including:

- Administrator training – this was provided to ensure the system administrative staff had the necessary skills to support and exploit the system to the full.
- Academic staff training – a bespoke training programme including introductory and advanced courses were developed to assist Manchester in migrating academic staff to the new environment. More than 1,000 staff were trained in the use of Blackboard Vista over the course of six months.
- Powersight training – Blackboard provided training in the use and deployment of the Blackboard Powersight™ tools to ensure that Manchester could effectively extract data to meet informational requests.

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Sarah Morgan,
*Strategic Projects Manager
in Teaching and Learning at
Manchester*

Collectively these solutions provided Manchester with the knowledge and skills to enable the transition of their staff to an enterprise environment and then to fully exploit it through enhanced administrative capabilities and innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

Project Management and Mentoring

Manchester spent approximately 18 months going through a change management process in an effort to embed e-Learning and encourage greater innovation in teaching and learning. The process was complex and challenging with many moving parts but because of working with many institutions globally, Blackboard provided a high degree of project management expertise.

Manchester recognised this and drew on Blackboard's expertise as the project was progressed ensuring

that relevant issues were addressed, risks managed and success secured. This was achieved through weekly calls and quarterly meetings between Blackboard's and the University of Manchester's Project Managers. Additionally, throughout the process Blackboard provided advice on specific issues such as communications, management and organisational issues, businesses processes and procedures, pilots, academic engagement, support infrastructure, etc. Sarah Morgan, Strategic Projects Manager in Teaching and Learning at Manchester said, “Our Blackboard Strategic Consultant provided invaluable strategic, tactical and operational support and advice throughout in shaping and forwarding a complex change management process that allowed Manchester to rapidly embed a sustainable and high value e-Learning solution.”

Whilst Manchester had broad project management experience, Blackboard's specific knowledge and expertise in deploying institution-wide e-Learning solutions added significant value, identifying issues before they arose, covering all the bases, and ensuring a smooth and successful deployment. It was very much a partnership

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Christine Whitehouse,
e-Learning Applications
Manager at Manchester

that helped to establish the technical infrastructure, develop a clear road map, address complex organisational and management issues, progress pilots and validate solutions. All of which has contributed to a successful transition and has laid the foundations for successfully embedding technology enhanced learning over the coming years. Christine Whitehouse, e-Learning Applications Manager at Manchester said “A strong working relationship has developed with the Blackboard team, which has ensured that a robust and scalable hosted service has been implemented to support our large user base.”

Moving forward, vigilance and effective maintenance is key to ensuring that the University’s deploy-

ment is consistently upgraded and that various integrations with other systems remain fully functional.

The Blackboard Consulting Services team has helped the University of Manchester strengthen its position in terms of learning innovation which will contribute to its ambition of becoming one of the top 25 institutions in the world by 2015. This was achieved through partnership; a partnership that built a knowledgeable and progressive team to support a reliable infrastructure that is integrated with the University’s SIS and core systems. This lays the foundation for Manchester to secure its goals and further embed innovation in teaching and learning within the organisation.

