Enhancing your use of Brightspace: staff sessions

The UHI Learning and Teaching Academy are running a workshop series that will provide opportunities for staff across the Academic Partnership to explore the VLE Brightspace in relation to supporting student engagement, retention and collaboration.

These workshops build upon previous 'Making more advanced use of Brightspace' sessions and will offer demonstrations, best practice use cases and practical tips and activities that staff can easily implement into their practice. The 90-minute workshops relate to three distinct areas of practice and will be delivered online. Each workshop will be delivered twice across March - April 2026.

- Making better use of analytics and evaluating student engagement
- Creating peer-peer support and collaboration opportunities
- Embedding interactivities and rich content in your learning and teaching, including the use of Generative AI

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Alignment to the UHI Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy Values

The topics covered in these workshops align with several values in the UHI Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy, including:

- Supporting the learner as an individual
- Supporting flexible and student-centred learning
- Connecting learning across communities
- Enriching learning through digital practices

UHI Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy

Alignment to Professional Standards

We have aligned the workshops to the Standards for Lecturers in Scotland's Colleges and colleagues can use the LTA mapping resource to see engagement in the workshops also aligns to the Advance HE Professional Standards Framework (PSF 2023).

Workshop 1: Making better use of analytics and evaluating student engagement

Course Overview widget; **Class List and Class Progress**; **Intelligent Agents**; and making use of **other data in Brightspace**.

- Demonstrating functions within Brightspace that provide opportunities for staff to identify student access and engagement. This will lead into discussions around what these tools can be used to do to support unit, module and programme leaders to be proactive in identifying students who might need additional support.

- Student support and retention is also a driver for the use of Intelligent Agents – a valuable tool that can be set up in advance to send automated feedback to students when certain conditions are met. There is an efficiency to this and a degree of confidence that as soon as a certain condition is met, staff will be alerted to it, and that students affected will automatically and immediately contacted. The session will cover a wide variety of scenarios that Intelligent Agents can be utilised, and workshop participants will be offered the opportunity to set some up during the session.

- Additionally, the Course Overview widget can show staff how much time students in Brightspace spend on learning tools. Although drawing definitive conclusions takes some time and collaboration, this feature can highlight tools that are not being used by students. Staff can then consider minor redesigns of their modules or implementing additional student guidance.

Workshop dates:

- Thursday 5 March, 1500 - 1630 **or**
- Tuesday 7 April, 1400 - 1530

What can you do to identify and encourage student engagement?

The Open University offer some [tips for design learning](#) for engagement and retention. In relation to this topic some of these might include:

1. Engage students early-on in the module and make sure that the first few weeks of study materials draw students in.
2. Look for potential retention blackspots and address these as far as possible.
3. Cater for students who fall behind, by, for example, building in reflection and catch-up weeks.

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Why?

We know that utilising analytics within the virtual learning environment can support staff to identify students who are not engaging in learning, or who have stopped engaging, or have inconsistent engagement. This data and 'trends of engagement' can offer opportunities to connect with these students and support them to reengage or offer additional support, flexibility or alternative learning opportunities to encourage engagement. This doesn't need to be time heavy for staff, Brightspace has tools that can automate initial contact with the student which can then lead to further discussions and interventions if needed. Evaluating the use of the VLE can also identify learning design changes and enhance the learning environment for students.

Professional Standards for Lecturers in Scotland's Colleges

2.4.3: Understands how and when to signpost students at key points in learning to appropriate and impartial advice, support, and guidance.

2.2.10: Understands how to interpret and share data to inform learning, teaching and assessment

Workshop 2: Creating peer-peer support and collaboration opportunities

This workshop will explore some of the collaborative tools in Brightspace, including **Discussions, and Groups** (and supporting **group working** in general). Collaboration is also a key component of **peer engagement**, **peer review** and **feedback**, the session will explore with participants:

- Using a mixture of demonstration, conversation and hands-on tasks, we will look at how well set up Brightspace is to allow for collaboration in many ways (and formats).
- Success in this area of online activity does not come automatically, there is also a definite need for support, facilitation and guidance. We will also touch on how staff may approach those needs within this context.

Workshop dates:

- Wednesday 11 March, 1500 - 1630 **or**
- Wednesday 29 April, 1330 - 1500

What can you do to design student collaboration and peer engagement?

The Open University offer some [tips for design learning](#) for engagement and retention. In relation to this topic some of these might include:

- Create meaningful opportunities for student communication and collaboration.
- Ensure that communicative and collaborative activities are well-structured and have a clear purpose.
- Provide guidance and ground rules for participation and interaction in communicative and collaborative activities.
- Encourage students to engage in supportive interaction and mutual exchange of ideas.
- Take into consideration how tutorials, tutors and meaningful activities can be used to build the students' skills and confidence to engage in collaboration.
- Scaffold collaborative activities to help build students' confidence and teamwork skills, thus encouraging engagement.

Image by Bob Dmyt from Pixabay

Why?

Research shows us that developing Communities of Inquiry (CoI) and Practice (CoP) through online collaboration and learning design supports students to work towards the same goal, encouraging motivation and knowledge exchange and development.

Building social presence online in the VLE can also develop digital confidence and literacy skills.

Critical feedback and peer review can encourage students to take some responsibility for their own learning and the learning or their peers and encourage engagement and academic responsibility.

Professional Standards for Lecturers in Scotland's Colleges

2.2.5: Understands how to encourage students to work in partnership and collaborate in their own learning and the enhancement/development of learning.

1.2.3: Promotes, enables and empowers students to engage and achieve in learning in order to maximise their potential.

1.2.4. Supports and encourages students to take personal responsibility for leading their own learning.

Workshop 3: Embedding interactivities and rich content in your learning and teaching.

This workshop, which will include demonstrations on embedding **rich media** including videos, podcasts and LinkedIn Learning in Brightspace units/modules, will also, importantly focus on *why* this is a valid approach to online teaching. The session will also touch on Talis reading lists and the Library service in general, as well as potentially looking at making more creative use of announcements.

- Brightspace can host many types of multimedia – which can in turn really help to liven up a module/ encourage engagement, and there are many options for discovering such resources as a member of UHI staff (including using tools such as LinkedIn Learning which we subscribe to).
- An overlapping feature of each tool looked at in this session, will be the potential use of UHI approved Generative AI tools (GAI). Embarking on creating a number of pedagogically sound quizzes, for example, is a time-consuming task – and this expense might be what is keeping some from embracing the tool. GAI tools can be used here to help get the ball rolling, to help with question creation and/or a literature review to build up a rationale for the approach. Clearly, there's a point where getting a head start can blur into overreliance but that is no reason to ignore the potential (students face the same dilemma).

Workshop dates:

- Thursday 12 March, 1500 - 1630 **or**
- Thursday 30 April, 1330 - 1500

What can you do to student engagement with learning tools and interactivities?

The Open University offer some tips for design learning for engagement and retention. In relation to this topic some of these might include:

1. Ensure that switching between different media and platforms (e.g. VLE, print, software, simulations, etc.) is kept to a minimum.
2. Take into consideration choice and flexibility of assessment and activity topics or formats to allow students the opportunity to work to their strengths and to personalise learning to their individual goals.
3. Take into consideration the number of online tools and software students are expected to learn to use and engage with.

Image provided by D2L ©

Why?

Offering several ways to engage in learning can support choice and acknowledges the variety of ways that students learn.

Utilising Talis can add depth to reading lists with annotated notes and guidance alongside suggested reading, resources and rich media.

Quizzes can support learning and make learning interactive and fun, but they also give insight into areas of development and staff can utilise this information to identify additional learning resources, activities or guidance.

Generative AI can be used responsibly to save time for both staff and students. Exposing and introducing students to Gen AI creatively and safely ensures they develop a sense of responsibility and familiarity with what is acceptable use whilst studying at UHI.

Professional Standards for Lecturers in Scotland's Colleges

3.2.2: Plans, develops and uses a range of learning, teaching and assessment strategies to meet the different needs and learning preferences of students.

3.3.5: Adopts creative approaches to the embedding of appropriate digital technologies for effective planning, delivery and assessment of learning.

Presenter

Andrew Gibson has worked with the university's Learning and Teaching Academy for several years. Building on a Masters in Distance Education, his work at UHI has involved analysing existing materials and methods used by teaching staff, supervising the creation of student-centred learning materials, and designing and delivering targeted staff development especially around Brightspace, accessibility and, recently, AI.

Joining Andrew for workshop 3 will be Richard Hughes, University Librarian and Kaisa Szostak, Systems Librarian.

Booking

Book your place by emailing events.lta@uhi.ac.uk with the workshop(s) and date(s) that you would like to attend.

Additional Resources

The Open University Designing for Student Retention Health Check Resource, which is part of the ICEBERG Learning Design Model.

UHI Student Induction and Resource Hub

UHI Student Support – All Staff Hub

UHI Learning and Teaching Staff Support Portal, which includes guidance on:

- Course overview widget
- UHI GAI Policy and Guidance
- Embedding Talis Reading Lists
- Using Brightspace group tool
- Benchmarks for the use of technology in learning and teaching in Brightspace

UHI Student Retention and Success

Contact

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