

Blackboard Learn: Policy and Practice Managing the Course Lifecycle

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# Overview

This document sets out the policy and standardised practices when using the Blackboard virtual environment. Learning Edge is also a term used to refer to Blackboard Learn and associated supported online tools.

This policy is required to ensure a disciplined and consistent approach to housekeeping, management and ongoing development of these systems, to ensure a consistent staff and student experience. Exceptions can in some instances be accommodated and these are covered in the policy.

The area of learning technology systems is undergoing major changes not only at Edge Hill but across the sector therefore it will be reviewed and updated periodically to reflect product developments and as other systems interact with the core system, Blackboard Learn.

The policy is set out as a series of frequently asked questions which explain how things work and the related impact on practice.

# Blackboard Administration

## How do courses for a new Academic Year get created?

* Course data is pulled into Blackboard from Quercus, including the course code prefixed with the current academic year, and the name. Data in Blackboard is current and is as accurate as the data in Quercus, so if a new course is added to Quercus, it will generate in Blackboard overnight.
* The generated areas will have a template applied which includes specified 3rd Party Tools e.g. Qwickly Attendance tool.
* The process is automated with no scope for manual creation of Blackboard Programme or Module courses which have *automated* student enrolment.
* Departmental Administration teams are informed when course creation for a new Academic Year is completed.

## Will I automatically get access to my Blackboard areas?

* There is no automatic enrolment of administrative, academic or support staff into Blackboard courses. There is currently no way of automating this process.
* Learning Technology Development (LTD) will assign Faculty Administrators with Course Administration rights to Blackboard.
* Staff enrolments into Blackboard will be managed within faculties. Faculty course administrators will, on request, grant access to primary course contacts e.g. Programme/Course/Year/Module leads who will then be able to give their teams the required levels of access. Local processes may differ.
* LTD will need accurate records of all Faculty Administrative staff requiring course admin rights to Blackboard.
* Blackboard Qualification, Programme or module course areas will have been generated automatically but will remain invisible to academic staff until they have been enrolled into the relevant course.

## How do my students get access to Course and Module areas in Blackboard?

* Student data is pulled into Blackboard from Quercus, therefore data in Blackboard is current and is as accurate as the data in Quercus.
* Changes in student or course records in Quercus are reflected in Blackboard when hourly updates are sent through. Therefore, if course or student information is incorrect in Quercus, it will be incorrect in Blackboard and will impact on staff/student access and experience.
* All changes to student data must be made in Quercus.
* Students should not be manually added to automated Programme or Module areas. Exceptions can be accommodated by the allocation of a role that indicates their presence in the module, e.g. student mentor role. Staff should consult LTD for the most appropriate action.
* Changes to student status in Quercus can take place over the life of a course depending on individual student circumstances and may impact on what they can access in Blackboard. For example, if a student interrupts their studies, they will retain access to completed Modules, but not to other Modules. When a student interrupts the module status appears as 'Intercalated' in SID, while completed modules remain as 'Registered'.

## How can I make sure students enrolled on different instances of a module are taught and/or supported in a single area in Blackboard?

* There is 1-1 mapping between Quercus/Blackboard courses and enrolments through feed files sent at regular intervals, and so no manual data entry is required.
* In some cases, Quercus course records may not reflect the taught curriculum at Edge Hill e.g. a full-time module and its part-time equivalent will have separate records in Quercus but may be taught as a single unit in the face-to-face classroom and/or in Blackboard.
* To reflect the taught curriculum in Blackboard it may be necessary to create a new ‘parent’ course that merges together a series of ‘child’ courses using the **Course Relationship Tool.**
* The term ‘merge’ is misleading as the shell courses continue to exist individually – it is their enrolments that are ‘merged’ into the parent area. The student doesn't see evidence of the merge having happened, when they click on the area they are enrolled on, they will land on the home page of the parent area.
* A merge may happen in one of two ways: by merging instances of the same module into the main module; or by creating a new Blackboard course to act as the parent.
* Faculty Administrative staff are responsible for creating parent courses and the child relationships [based on Academic requirements]. The term used for this type of area in Blackboard is ‘merge’.
* The new courses created by a merge must be given a file name that is consistent with course naming conventions already in use in Blackboard (see section below). This will ensure the integrity of data records within Blackboard and will make future searching/ retrieval of these merged courses possible.
* If a merge is performed in error, departments should contact LTD as soon as possible. Only LTD may separate the merged courses, as there may be implications should significant student activity (assessment) have taken place.
* LTD will associate system create courses to the correct Hierarchy to ensure they have the correct course and 3rd party tools available.

## What are the naming conventions for ‘merged’ courses?

* Merged courses are created manually (see section above) to enable delivery of the taught programme in a single space (where difference instances are present in Quercus, and so are the same in Blackboard.
* These merged areas require naming by the administrator working with their academic colleagues. A consistent approach is required for naming merged courses to enable them to be easily identified and retrieved from among the many thousands of courses in Blackboard.
* Note it is NOT possible to make a course a child course of more than one parent course.

Parent courses should follow the conventions described below:

* **Begin** with an academic year reference i.e. ‘2024\_’ as this will determine the retention period for the area
* **End** with ‘\_MRG’ so all merged (parent) courses can be easily identified
* Contain course ID references which provide adequate information about the area
* The merged area name should be relevant and identifiable for users.

The syntax for a merged course ID is: <ACADEMIC YEAR1>\_<COURSE ID>\_<MRG>

1ACADEMIC YEAR This is the academic year they are registered in, therefore, all merged courses running in the Sept 2024 to Aug 2025 academic year will have a prefix of 2024 regardless of their intake or start date.

## We have some compulsory activities that are needed across many programmes / modules yet are not credit bearing. How might we create a Blackboard course with those students enrolled?

* Examples include the Training Needs Analysis from the teacher training teams, or Clinical Skills across several nursing programmes.
* Academic Registry have agreed to construct zero credit bearing modules for this circumstance. You need to let Academic Registry know BEFORE students enrol or re-enrol – because the automated enrolment system cannot be setup once student have begun to enrol.

## I need to create a Blackboard area that is not linked to Quercus and is not for delivery of taught curriculum. Can I do this?

LTD can create an Organisation on request - these are like courses, but with different enrolment options, from manual entry, through to ‘self-enrolment’. They are never automated.

Maybe you are…

* A Researcher and want somewhere to store documents, promote events, record surveys and centralise collaboration.
* A Society may want to share their passion with other likeminded participants.
* A member of a team and want to organise your (online) meetings, information, communication and collaboration in a single location.
* A tutor who wants to develop an area of excellence which goes beyond the scope of the taught curriculum

A Blackboard Organisation is an area modelled on an empty Blackboard Course that can be used by staff and students from all faculties and departments for activities that are in support of the educational, research, administrative and social mission of the University.

An Organisation shares the same layout, tools, and features as a Blackboard course, allowing authorised participants who have Blackboard accounts to access documents and collaborate with other organisation participants in a secure environment. However, unlike a Blackboard course an organisation;

* Cannot be used for course credit-earning activities
* Will remain active for at least one academic year (August to August).
* Can remain active for multiple years (if continually approved).
* Must be requested and approved.
* Must meet its request criteria each year (to remain available).
* Offer communities of support and practice for staff, students and potentially externals.

# Build and Teach

## Can I upload large files directly into Blackboard?

* EHU’s Blackboard is externally hosted by Blackboard under a licensing agreement. We need to exercise effective system management to ensure we stay well within the data storage limits contained within our Blackboard license. This will allow for an expansion in Blackboard use across the University. LTD will monitor Blackboard data usage to ensure that it stays within license.
* Each course is allocated a 2GB storage limit, and staff should maintain course content so that unnecessary files are removed. LTD will work with colleagues who need support and guidance in how to keep their Blackboard courses within the allowance
* During the annual activity to populate courses for the upcoming Academic Year, staff should exercise caution when using the copy tools in Blackboard. They should make use of the unused files tool in courses to tidy up files and employ selective copy as the most effective option.
* Very large files uploaded directly into Blackboard courses can cause problems when uploading/ downloading and offer a poor staff and student experience.
* PowerPoint and Word can produce very large file sizes, usually the result of incorporating large format or high-resolution images into the presentation. This may be of value when presenting the in class but presents problems when delivered online via a Blackboard course. Large files can be compressed for use in Blackboard.
* Exceptions can be managed, and each request will be supported wherever possible.
* Audio/Visual content must be uploaded to Panopto and may then be embedded into course content.

## Will my students automatically see the content in my courses?

* As explained earlier, all student enrolments into Blackboard courses are automated because of the integration with Quercus. There may be exceptions, such as Organisations.
* Some Academic Registry processes may also delay visibility of a course to an individual in Blackboard, such as late admissions, outstanding DBS clearance or Occupational Health assessment. Enrolment to modules is also dependent on the student completing their Stage 2 enrolment
* Although enrolled, students will not automatically see their core course and module areas in Blackboard at the start of the semester.
* Academic colleagues need to make them available to students. This allows for the courses to be built out of public view.
* It is recommended that course teams agree release dates for Programme/Module courses to ensure the access provided to students is coherent (i.e. across modules on the same Programme).

## How can I enrol a student who is resubmitting coursework or resitting an exam onto a more recent version of the course in Blackboard?

* As explained earlier, all student enrolments into Blackboard are now automated because of the integration with Quercus.
* Students resitting should submit work into the module where they submitted originally.
* If there is a need to enrol students from previous years into the current year, then Academic Registry will need to create a cohort for those students and that cohort’s Blackboard area made a ‘child’ of the current cohorts’ course.
* Note it is NOT possible to make a course a child course of more than one parent course.
* Students should not be added manually to core course and module areas. This can cause problems, and in the event of issues leads to a poor student experience. The automated feeds are intended to reflect Quercus as the source of truth for enrolments.
* Please consult LTD if you are unsure of the best course of action.

## How can I give access to someone who is not an enrolled student or a member of staff?

* There may be circumstances were non-enrolled users, (including users without Blackboard accounts), such as external examiners or partner tutors, require access to Blackboard areas.
* These users must be invited to [apply for an account](https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/guide/vle-external-access/), selecting the correct Faculty. This is then approved by designated Department Professional Support staff. This account will give access to Blackboard, and will require the user registered for MFA.
* An **External Examiner** role is available for external examiners providing access to course files and content, course tools and the Grade Centre.
* Please contact LTD if you have a specific scenario not covered.

# Archiving and Housekeeping

## How long will a Blackboard course be available to students, and retained for staff access?

* EHU’s policy is to retain assessments where possible for 5 years after a course.
* Therefore, course areas will be disabled on the system (meaning they are not accessible to staff or students) in the fourth year and deleted from the system in the eighth year. The life of a course in Blackboard will cover setup, planning, building, delivery and a resubmission periods.
* Exceptions can be accommodated but it is expected that most Blackboard courses will be disabled and removed from the system as planned.
* Exceptions from deletion will be identified as part of the process, where an assessment submission date within a Blackboard area falls within the previous 5 years at the scheduled point of deletion.
* A robust cycle of Blackboard ‘housekeeping’ is necessary to ensure the system is managed effectively and stays well within the data storage limits contained within our Blackboard license.
* The normal process for the management of Blackboard courses which follow a standard semester pattern, is for courses to be hidden from students until the first day of the semester in which the course runs.
* Students should be advised to save and store discussions, other collaboration outputs, work and other materials that are important to them before their access ends.
* Although teaching content is held in Blackboard, staff should retain backups of their own teaching materials and not rely on it being in Blackboard.
* Where an accidental deletion of an activity/assessment has occurred in Blackboard, staff should contact LTD as soon as possible, it *may* be possible to recover from Blackboard Automatic Archives if this occurred within 30 days.
* Blackboard courses that have reached their end date will be deleted from the system with no recovery possible after that point.
* Whilst Panopto video content is accessed and visible in Blackboard, the storage is in Panopto. Video content stored on Panopto is archived after 2 years without views, and then will be retained for a further 6 years in archive storage.
* Please refer to the [Blackboard Retention and Archive Policy](https://eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/id/eprint/16681) for details [June 2024]