# Building Capacity Project - Teaching and Learning Portal

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## Background

The UoB introduced the PGC TL HE in 2009 with a view to assisting their teaching staff to develop and align with the HEA. This course has been well attended and popular, and furthermore, ‘communities of enquiry’ and ‘reflective practice’ have enabled groups and individuals to discuss, investigate, and report on teaching and learning dilemmas that occur across the various departments within the UoB. These valuable activities, however, lack the coordination and the structure that would enable them to be of use to the wider teaching community.

Around the same time a new VLE ‘Moodle’ was introduced to the university. The university has invested significantly with regard to staff development of Moodle and it has been adopted by many. Far from being a simple repository for course materials, many staff have developed Moodle further and proactively utilised Moodle to extend the classroom virtually. On the one hand, the adoption and speedy development of the use of this tool is beneficial to individuals, however, on the other it represents a community of learners with no framework in place to disseminate to the wider community any good practice within.

There are many other such resource ‘pockets’ dotted across the University, where academics are taking steps to address internal teaching and learning dilemmas, however the fragmented and informal nature of these activities makes capturing and sharing this rich resource difficult. There are mechanisms to collect and share these resources such as web pages, but they tend to be one way streets, where the viewer can take by absorbing, but not respond. This lack of interaction could be addressed by generating an online area where staff can discuss topical issues and respond asynchronously.

This arm of the project intends to address the issues outlined above by identifying areas of good practice, to capture and record this good practice thus enabling these practices to be disseminated, digested, improved, debated and ultimately owned and shared amongst the wider teaching community at the UoB.

In summary, the environment should:

1. be an interactive environment;
2. ability to have different access privileges (password or enrolment);
3. make use of existing University platforms (no new software);
4. complement rather than compete with existing resource and activities.

## Project Aim

Aim: To identify, collect, disseminate, and coordinate evidence of good practice with regard to Teaching and Learning at the University of Bolton. To facilitate a dynamic, interactive teaching and learning space, an online ‘coffee shop’ to share and explore ideas and experiences in a safe, non judgemental nurturing environment.

## Evidence of Good Practice/Project Scope

To assist the project focus the team met to define what should be included and what should not. For the purpose of this endeavour ‘evidence of good practice’ relates to teaching and learning activities such as:

1. the focus of an individual on a particular teaching or learning dilemma;
2. discussion around teaching and learning issues amongst staff;
3. the dissemination of  teaching and learning practice through workshops or conferences;
4. and the efforts of departments to further improve teaching and learning amongst staff.

Whilst the following could also be classified as ‘evidence of good practice’ and may be included as the project develops it is not the intention in the initial stages to include activities such as:

1. induction for lecturers;
2. staff training activities;
3. and help for the administration duties of staff.

## Collection and Dissemination

A number of criteria needed to be considered before a medium of dissemination is established. The overall initial vision was to create an online resource that would link into other LEPDU activities. Rather than being a central repository like a library or a database of hyperlinks we wanted to create an interactive ‘community of inquiry’ where points could be raised and discussed. If the points are recorded perhaps at a later date they could then be categorised. This presents problems; communities of enquiry are often safe (within reason) in that participants can speak freely without redress, participants may also divulge personal information or opinion, and they often contain sensitive information that potentially could be misused. There also needs to be awareness that in reflective practice one often explores one’s own misgivings and weaknesses that could lead to embarrassment. In brief, to form our online community there needs to be protection for the participants and it will also demand an element of trust from participants.

## Participants

The team are keen that this project provides a good resource for all academics in the UoB, however, we felt that the best approach would be to set the project up as a pilot initially and invite those that we believe would need or use it most. The PGC TL HE cohorts appear to satisfy these requirements and would provide us with a ready cohort of contributors and additionally a diverse range of teaching experience if we were also to include their mentors and staff; this represents around 100 potential users.

## Components and Rationale

### Member introduction

There will be an opportunity for graduates and participants in the PGC TLHE to give a short introduction about the topics they are researching. The exact tool for this has yet to be decided. So far we have experimented with database and glossary, the latter seems favourable.

### RSS feeds

RSS feeds provide live feeds to educational resources such as the HEA, JISC and such like that would hopefully generate points of interest for debate and discussion.

### Glossary

Glossary will provide a searchable catalogue of staff that have or are pursuing activities in teaching and learning. This may include their department and subject area as a means of identification, but the emphasis will be on their interests in T & L. For example, a Lecturer in Maths may be doing the PGC TLHE and she has developed an interest in collaborative learning. The emphasis would be collaborative learning.

### Moodle site of the month link

The team has identified that much of what happens in Moodle is locked to other staff. Guest access works well but is limited in terms of control. Examples of good sites are not readily accessible and their location is often hidden or unknown. We are suggesting that individual staff can offer their site up as an example of good practice and direct colleagues to it for a limited amount of time. They will also be asked to submit a short synopsis of how it has worked, what was the intention, what didn’t work and so on.

### Dilemma/s of the month/week

In order to engage staff we intend to regularly publish T & L dilemma’s in a forum style environment and invite staff to give their opinions. These are multi purpose, on the one hand they may encourage staff visiting the site to stay and join in, and on the other will encourage open debate about current issues and in time create a FAQs of T & L at the UoB. We are anxious that this does not turn into a political free for all so this will require maintenance/ attendance. The main benefit of a tool like this is that as soon as a participant posts a reply to a dilemma it immediately email the reply out to everyone enrolled, encouraging them to become involved. We feel that dilemmas could be requested in the first instance through the LEPDU news.

### Resources

The portal would also be stocked with relevant resources such as contributions from the annual teaching and learning conference and other such activities. However, we are keen to monitor this and present the information in an accessible and structured way rather than simply posting pdf., files.

### Direct links to sub-sites

We are currently investigating the possibility of making the LEPDU portal the main ‘door’ to access all the sub-moodle sub-sites related to Teaching and Learning, guiding staff through rather than creating a cul-de-sac. This would mean changes to the whole structure of Moodle and affects the hierarchies. The team felt that this would not only be of benefit to this project but it would benefit Moodle use across the University. We are in discussion with the Moodle development team regarding this matter.

## Development

We have undertaken the first phase of development of the VLE although it is still early days and systematic user feedback has not yet been collected for evaluation of the site. The image below is a schematic of the flow of information and on the next page is a screenshot of the layout of the LEPDU portal.

