

GOTAFE MOODLE THEME

*Analysis of the modified Moodle theme, across a range of **mobile & desktop** browsers*

Greg Bird 14.07.16

The purpose of this report is to analyse the newly modified Moodle theme (*Greg Bird, July 2016*) on a range of platforms and browsers. Specifically, it is to evaluate the theme on mobile devices, such as tablets and smart phones.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Testing was performed on a broad range of devices, platforms, browsers and operating systems. These are representative of the current GoTAFE Moodle usage patterns (as established by Google Analytics)

- Windows – IE 11, Chrome (latest), Firefox (latest)
- Mac - Chrome (latest), Firefox (latest), Safari (latest)
- Apple (iOS) – iPad Pro, iPad Air, iPhone 6s, iPhone 6+
- Android – Samsung Galaxy Tab, Samsung Galaxy Note, Google Nexus

Testing included **Moodle Mobile**, a dedicated app for Moodle, available on **iOS** and **Android**

Testing explored basic navigation, screen layout and appearance. It did not comprehensively test all Moodle functionality, but focused on the user experience.

Overall the experience was **good** and **predictable** on all devices tested. The Moodle theme **adapts** to the device, such that the layout of content best fits the space available. Buttons, tabs and links are sufficiently large as to be well resolved and 'clickable', even on smaller screens.

This report includes recommendations to increase the uptake, usability and functionality of Moodle on a range of devices.

ADAPTIVE LAYOUT ON MOBILE DEVICES

On smaller format devices, such as **iPhones & Android Phones** the layout **adapts** to the available screen. The experience is different, if the device is help in **landscape**, or **portrait**

Portrait

In portrait view, tabs each tab expand to full screen width. As such, each tab occupies one line. This is to increase readability on smaller screen widths and to ensure that tabs are 'clickable'.

Layout collapses to a **single column** and the right & left columns are removed. **Blocks** are available **lower** on the screen (below the content), after scrolling.



iPhone 6s



Google Nexus 6



Samsung Galaxy Note 4

Landscape

In landscape view, focus is given to the content. Layout collapses to a **single column**, as for portrait. Within this **single column**, the layout and navigation is similar to the desktop..



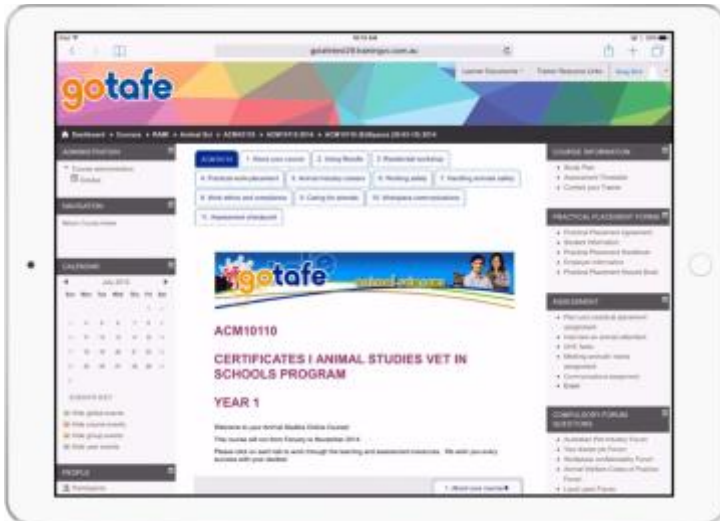
iPhone 6s



Samsung Galaxy Note 4

TABLET BROWSING

On tablets, such as **iPads** and **Samsung Galaxy Tabs**, the user experience is very similar to the desktop browser. The traditional **3 column layout** is maintained and the **blocks** are available in the right & left column, as per the desktop.



iPad Pro (12.9")



Samsung Galaxy Tab 4

DESKTOP BROWSING

Desktop browsing is as expected, and consistent across all modern **browsers** and **Operating Systems** tested.



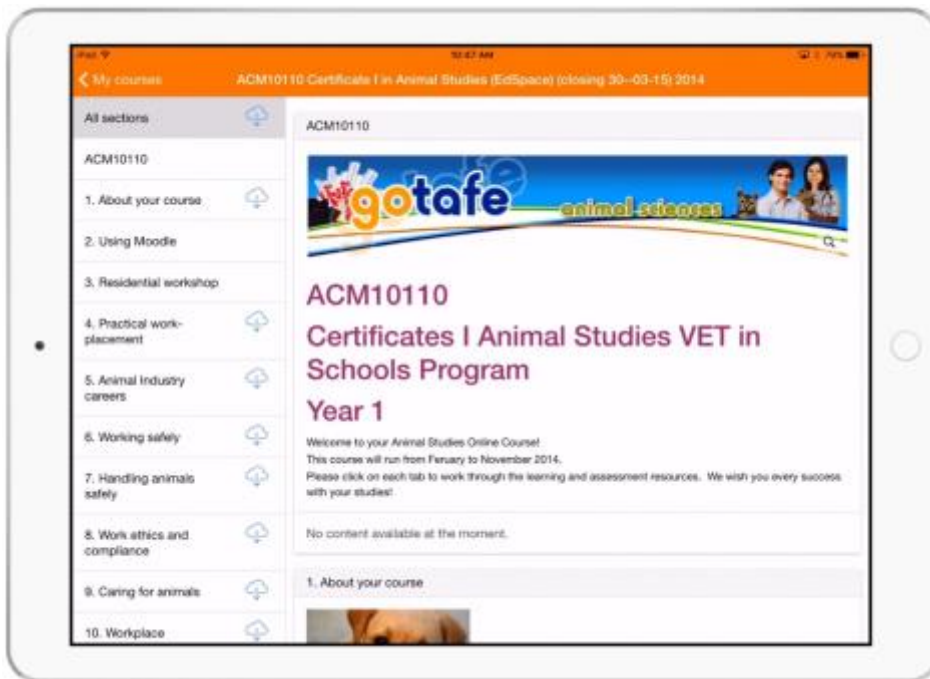
IE 11 on Windows



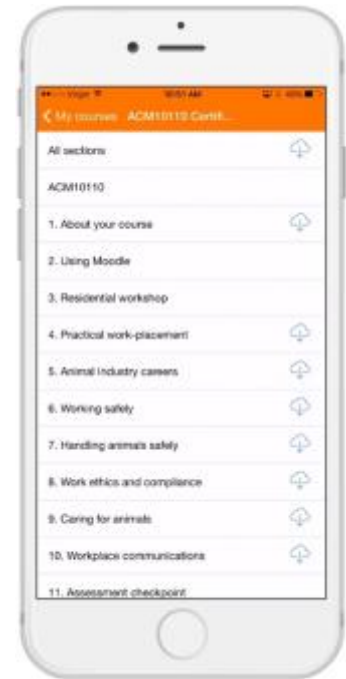
Chrome (latest) on Mac

MOODLE MOBILE

Moodle Mobile is a dedicated Moodle app, for both **iOS** and **Android** (A legacy version is also available for Windows phones, but this is no longer supported).



iPad Pro (12.9)



iPhone 6+ (portrait view)

In Moodle Mobile, the traditional navigation (eg tabs) is removed, in favour of its own dedicated navigation panel, as shown above. It has a number of key advantages, over and above the mobile browsing experience:

- **Push notifications:** Students can receive messages directly to their phone, including notifications of upcoming events, overdue assignments and direct messages from their teacher or fellow students. This is a **massive improvement** over traditional email based notifications
- **Offline browsing:** Students can download their learning content to their device for offline browsing. This means that they can download large files whilst on wifi, and avoid costly mobile data expenditures
- **Direct messaging:** Students can quickly compose and send messages to their teacher or fellow student. These will arrive **instantly** to other users of Moodle Mobile

RECOMMENDATIONS

On balance, Moodle performs well on the Mobile device and delivers the user experience you would expect. The current Moodle theme is functional, and adapts well to the device.

As at 14.07.16, the usage of Mobile devices to access Moodle at GoTAFE is approaching **20% of total traffic**. This is a significant proportion of overall use, and is likely to grow considerably over the next years. As such, it is wise to **plan now** for this growth now.

1. Configure and Promote the use of Moodle Mobile

Moodle Mobile is likely to become an important way that students and teachers access Moodle, particularly because of the **push notification** feature.

Currently, Moodle Mobile lacks all of the features of the desktop experience, but is being actively developed. Additional functionality will arrive via the 'additional features' plugin, and with Moodle 3.X, currently slated for an early Jan. 2017 upgrade.

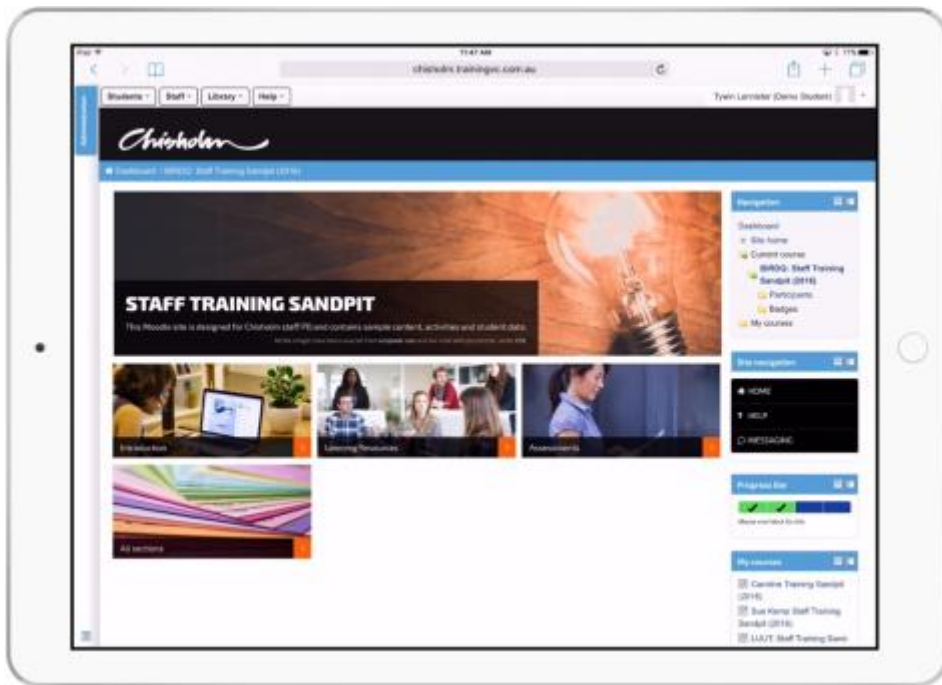
Recommended actions

1. Ensure that Moodle Mobile is properly configured on the production server, including for push notifications.
2. Lobby eWorks to deploy the 'additional features' plugin to the production environment.
3. Configure notification setting appropriately, so that students are not 'spammed' with unnecessary messages.
4. Perform UAT (User Acceptance Testing) with key students and staff
5. Promote the availability of Moodle Mobile, through a dedicated screencast ([see example](#)) and other means.
6. Provide instructions to students and staff on how to configure their messaging preferences ([see example](#))

2. Consider other layouts for your templates, particularly the 'Tile format'

Whilst the current, tabs based navigation (one-topic format) is serviceable, there are other course formats that are better suited for the mobile browsing experience.

The screen-captures below are from **Chisholm TAFE**, that widely use the '**Tile format**' for their templates. This format is excellent as it has been optimized for the device and dynamically adapts the layout, dependent on the available screen size.



iPad Pro (12.9")



iPhone 6+ (portrait view)

Recommended actions

1. As part of a larger review of the current templates, trial alternative formats, particularly 'Tiles'.
2. Consider applying a **two column** layout, rather than the current 3 columns. This will free up more of the screen for content. It will benefit the desktop experience as well.
3. Test these formats on a range of devices
4. Address any theming issues for the chosen format (Current GoTAFE tiles appearance looks a little "off")
5. Perform UAT with key staff

3. Identify all instances of Flash based content. Replace with alternatives (..... everywhere no excuses sorry)

Flash is a dead technology. It is unsupported on the majority of Mobile devices. It will soon be unsupported desktop browsers such as Google Chrome and Firefox.

This poses a challenge for VET providers, particularly around our legacy content. It was common practice 4+ years ago to develop in Flash. As such, older Toolboxes and other Learning Objects may still contain Flash based content

1. Identify all examples of current Flash based content
2. If possible, contact the vendor and request a non-Flash based alternative. Authoring tools such as Adobe Captivate and Articulate Storyline can now export HTML5 alternatives
3. Otherwise, identify alternative content to achieve the same learning.
4. Replace all Flash content with the non-Flash alternatives from above.

4. Design for the device

Consider how students will interact with their learning on the device. This will often be in a distracted environment, with limited amount of time. It will be easier for them to consume this content in short, sharp bursts.

1. Consider how quickly you become distracted, when on the device and design accordingly. I would recommend planning for a 15 minute attention span
2. Consider 'chunking' your content into smaller sections
3. Reduce the amount of text on screen that would result in long scrolling content.
4. Enrich this content with appropriate videos, images and other media
5. Create opportunities for them to engage with the learning through discussions, blogs, quizzes etc.
6. Create opportunities to contribute to the content, eg. by taking photos of a workplace evidence on their phone and contributing this to blogs, discussions journals etc.

5. Review underlying (core) Moodle theme. Consider alternatives

As evidenced earlier in the document, the current Moodle theme for Moodle is functional, and provides a good Mobile experience for students and staff.

Moodle theming changes have been achieved by overriding the core theme (Androtheme? – Aileen to confirm), with custom CSS

Other Moodle core themes have been designed specifically for the Mobile Experience (Clean, Essential, BCU etc.). [List of themes here.](#)

A shift to a new core theme is a much longer (and more expensive) proposition, as it will require work be done by eWorks and Androgogic. It will also likely involve the contracting of a graphic design firm that specialise in the creation of Moodle themes.

1. Review alternative themes. This may require a new, out-of-the-box installation of Moodle, as these themes are not currently available on GoTAFE servers.
Greg can demonstrate on his own, local copies of Moodle
2. Consider the timing of a theme change. I would recommend you align this to the upgrade of Moodle 3.1
3. Consult with eWorks and Androgogic on what themes they will support, and at what cost (development, deployment and ongoing maintenance)
4. Consider out-sourcing the development to a dedicated Moodle Theme specialist.