

Quick Guide to Communication Tools in Blackboard 9.1 [1]

There are a variety of communication tools in Blackboard 9.1. It might not always be obvious which tool is most appropriate in certain situations, so this is a quick guide to help you decide which one to use.

The aim of this guide is to help you learn how to communicate important information to your students in the new Weblearn environment.

The most important **Communication Tools** available to London Met users of Blackboard can be divided into two categories:

- 1. To communicate important information to students (often just one-way, for Tutor / Module Leader to students)**
 - Email
 - Messages
 - Announcements
 - Notifications (this is not really a tool but it's important to know how this feature works)
- 2. To provide a space for dialogue and discussion (these tools can be set up to be graded)**
 - Discussion Board
 - Blogs
 - Journals
 - Wikis

*This guide focuses on the first category of tools. For more on Discussion Boards, Blogs, Journals and Wikis, see: **Quick Guide to Communication Tools in Blackboard 9.1 [2]***

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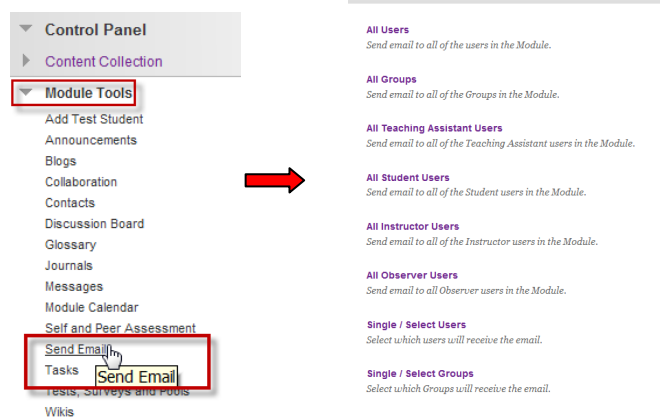
How to communicate important Information

Email

The **Email** tool is a great improvement on the previous Vista system because students no longer need to log in to Weblearn to receive important messages.

Teachers on a module can send individual students, groups or all students in the module an email from within Weblearn. The email will go direct to the students' London Met email address (Google mail).

Go to ➔ **Control Panel** ➔ **Send Email** then select the recipients.



If you are worried about receiving too many emails from students, you can control the options they have for sending email from within Weblearn. To do this:

Go to ➔ **Control Panel** ➔ **Customisation** ➔ **Tool Availability**

Click the drop-down arrow next to **Email**.



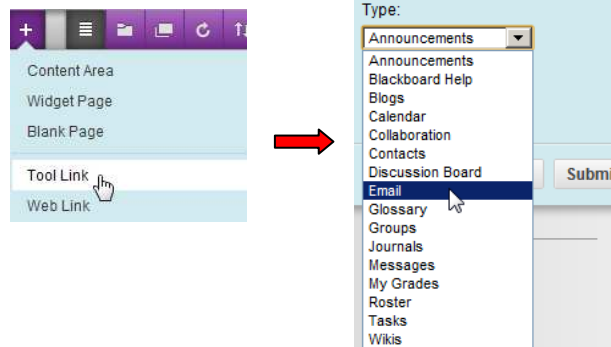
By unchecking the boxes, you can restrict the emails that students can send from within the module:

Send Email To	Available
All Users	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
All Groups	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
All Teaching Assistant Users	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
All Student Users	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
All Instructor Users	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Select Users	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Select Groups	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
All Observer Users	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Single / Select Observer users	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Nb: If you want students to be able to send email, you'll have to ensure that you create a Tool link on the Module Menu.

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From the **+** sign at the top left of the Module Menu:



Check the **Available to Users** box, **Submit** then position link where you want it to appear on the menu.

What's the difference between Email and Messages in Blackboard 9.1?

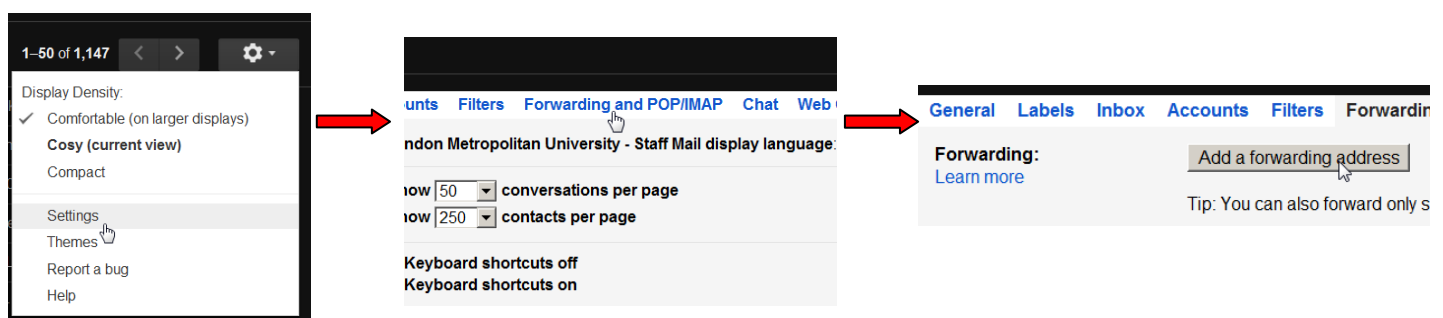
The great advantage of using **Email** is that students **do NOT** have to be logged in to Blackboard to receive these emails.

One of the disadvantages of the **Messages** feature in the old system, and in this current system, is that if a student has not logged in to Weblearn, they won't be able to see the message.

Nb: If you choose the Email option, it's important that teaching staff ensure that students know about and are using their university email, or, if they don't use it, that they set it up so that mail is forwarded to an email address that they do use regularly.

To do this, students need to log in to their University email account:

Go to **⇒ Settings** (top right of page) **⇒ Forwarding & POP/IMAP** **⇒ Add a Forwarding address**



You might choose to use **Messages** instead of **Email** if you prefer to keep all your communication within the Weblearn environment. This is fine, as long as you ensure that students are regularly checking their modules and will receive the important information they need. Using messages is fairly self-explanatory:

Go to **⇒ Control Panel** **⇒ Module Tools** **⇒ Messages**



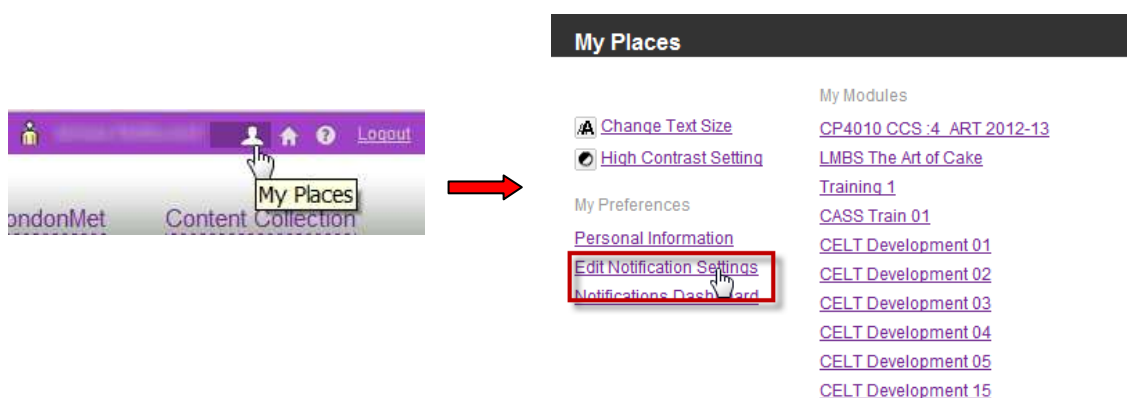
Notifications

These allow you to communicate important information to students in a number of ways. One new feature and possibly one of the most useful is the **Push Notification** option. It's possible for students who have smartphones or tablets to get Alerts any time an instructor adds content, an Announcement, an Assignment etc.

Students can choose to enable this feature themselves, select the modules they receive notifications from and which type of notification they want. If enabled, this has the advantage of more or less guaranteeing that the student will be aware of any changes or new content in the module. What it can't do is ensure that they do anything about it!

It is up to the student to decide which notifications they receive. To do this, there are several steps:

1. Go to ➔ **My Places** ➔ **Edit Notification Settings**



You can choose to edit individual module settings [**Edit Individual Module Settings**], or you can change the settings for all the Modules you are teaching on or are a student on by using Bulk Edit [**Bulk Edit Notification Settings**].

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When you go into a module's notification settings, you can check boxes for the type of Notification you want to receive. There are three places a user can receive notifications. These are:

Dashboard (notifications appear in widgets which are/can be added to the Module Dashboard)

Mobile (notifications will appear in Blackboard Mobile on a smartphone or tablet)

Email (notifications will be sent by email).

All the student/member of staff needs to do is select the boxes according to which notifications they want to receive.

2. Settings

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> On/Off	Notification	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dashboard	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mobile	<input type="checkbox"/> Email
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Announcement Available	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Assignment Available	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Assignment Due	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Assignment Past Due	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Assignment Submitted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Blog Needs Grading	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Content Item Available	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Discussion Board Forum Needs Grading	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

IMPORTANT: Editing these settings controls the various Notifications that you **RECEIVE**, and does not control which notifications from a module the student sees.

! The students themselves control their own Email and Mobile Notifications.

However, as Instructor on a module, you can have some control over the **Dashboard** notifications that students see in their Module Dashboard. This is done through **Widgets**. For example, an Instructor can make sure that Widgets such as **My Announcements**, **What's New** and **Alerts** are displayed on the dashboard. (see example below)

Students *cannot* remove these widgets from the module dashboard within a module.

Module Home ▼

[Add Module Widget](#) [Customise Page](#)

My Announcements
CELT Development 02
> [An example announcement](#)
[more announcements...](#)

What's New
[Edit Notification Settings](#) [Actions](#) ▼
▶ [Announcements](#) (1)
▶ [Content](#) (2)
Last Updated: 21 September 2012 10:55

Alerts
[Edit Notification Settings](#)
Past Due [Actions](#) ▼
No Notifications
Early-Warning System
▶ [CELT Development 02](#) (1)
Activity Alerts
No Notifications
Last Updated: 21 September 2012 10:55

Nb: your faculty may have made a decision to use a different page as the module entry point e.g. Announcements. If this is the case, the module dashboard may not be available. If you do want to use this type of notification, you can create a Widget page and add the relevant widgets (accessible through the + icon at the top of the Module Menu).

Push Notifications

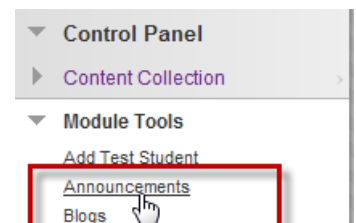
This is a new feature which allows students to be notified by an Alert to a mobile phone or tablet if they have downloaded the **Blackboard Mobile** App. In order to receive notifications direct to a Mobile or tablet, follow these steps.

1. Enable mobile settings in **Edit Notifications** as above.
2. Download the **Blackboard Mobile** App to your smartphone or tablet.
3. Make sure that in **Settings ⇒ Blackboard Mobile** that **Alerts** is enabled. This process may differ depending on the device and system (i.e IOS, Android)

If new content, an Announcement or new Assignment (for example) are added to the module, an alert will appear on the mobile phone or tablet telling the student and giving the option to go straight to the module to see it. This is a good way to keep students up to date, but it is *the student's decision* whether they use this feature.

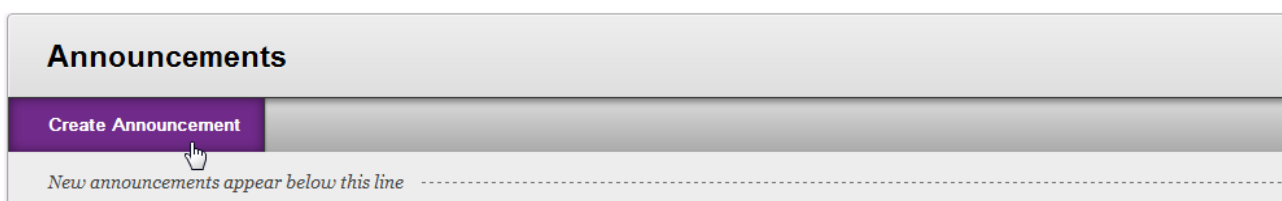
Announcements

This is a standard way to communicate with an entire module. Several enhancements have been made to the tool compared to the Vista version. An Instructor can now include a link to a content area, learning module, Assignment etc with an Announcement to make it clear what the announcement is referring to. There is also an option to send an email to reinforce the Announcement directly from the set up page.



To create a new announcement from within the relevant module:

Go to ⇒ **Control Panel** ⇒ **Module Tools** ⇒ **Announcements**



Click on **Create Announcement**, add a Title and Message then select the relevant options in 2 and 3.

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2. Web Announcement Options

Duration ☐ Not Date Restricted
☒ Date Restricted

Select Date Restrictions
☐ Display After 21/09/2012 07:49
☐ Display Until 22/09/2012 07:49

Email Announcement
☐ Send a copy of this announcement immediately

You can choose when you want the announcement displayed. You can also ensure that an email of the announcement is sent automatically to students when it is created.

If you want to include a link to a particular item within your module, you can browse for the location in step 3. In the example below, a link to a new content area in the module containing reading material has been included.

3. Module Link

Click **Browse** to choose an item.

Location

An example announcement

Posted on: Friday, 21 September 2012

Announcements are an effective way to communicate important information to students.

Module Link [/Learning Materials/Lectures](#)

Nb: All the Communication Tools covered in this guide are 'asynchronous' i.e. the communication does not take place in real time, simultaneously.

For synchronous communication, the basic **Chat** tool provided in Blackboard Learn is not very good. If you want to communicate in this way with students, it is probably better to use an external tool such as Google Chat or Skype.