**UCA Digital Learning Review**

Introduction

UCA is committed to enhancing its digital learning, we are seeking a supplier to evaluate our use of Blackboard Ultra.

We are seeking a supplier who has significant experience with Blackboard Ultra to lead strategic review of the university's digital learning environment. This includes auditing module sites, engaging stakeholders, and delivering actionable recommendations to support future online postgraduate and CPD offerings. The work will span four key phases: scoping, site analysis, stakeholder engagement, and final reporting.

Suppliers must have:

Proven experience with Blackboard Ultra within a higher education setting

Strong understanding of digital learning, especially in creative disciplines

Excellent stakeholder engagement and qualitative research skills

Ability to deliver clear, strategic documentation and recommendations

Familiarity with online postgraduate and CPD programme design

* Balanced across evaluation, consultation, and strategic recommendation.
* Tailored to creative university context, with future-facing online degree considerations.
* Final report due before December 19th 2025.

**Stage 1: Scoping & Contextualisation**

**Objectives:**

1. Establish the project’s scope, goals, and success measures.
2. Understand the university’s creative and specialist teaching context.
3. Map out current Blackboard Ultra structures and policies.

**Activities:**

1. Initial briefing with senior leadership (e.g., PVC Education, Digital Learning leads, Blackboard Team).
2. Review institutional strategy documents (teaching & learning, digital learning, online provision, digital enabling strategy).
3. Map sample set of Blackboard Ultra module sites (representative across disciplines).
4. Define evaluation criteria (accessibility, pedagogy, consistency, creative affordances).
5. Map existing online sites and develop a template for adopting a consistent approach for learning sites

**Deliverables**:

1. Project plan confirmation with refined focus.
2. Sampling framework for site analysis.
3. Agreed evaluation rubric/checklist and mapping document
4. Template next stages at adopting creative education and digital strategy goals

**Stage 2: Site Analysis & Baseline Review**

**Objectives:**

1. Examine individual Blackboard Ultra module sites.
2. Identify strengths, gaps, and inconsistencies in site design and use.
3. Document creative practices and missed opportunities.

**Activities**:

1. Review with focus on a limited sample of 15–20 module sites across UG and PG programmes (with staff consent).
2. Evaluate site structure, clarity, accessibility, learning materials, use of tools (discussion boards, assessment, feedback).
3. Document good practice examples and challenges (esp. for creative subjects – e.g., visual content, studio-based learning).
4. Consult digital learning support staff about training provision and technical barriers.

**Deliverables:**

1. Interim report: “Current State of Blackboard Ultra Use” including site review findings.
2. Case study vignettes highlighting exemplary and problematic practice.

**Stage 3: Stakeholder Engagement & Future Needs**

**Objectives:**

1. Gather staff and student perspectives and external CPD orientated on Blackboard Ultra.
2. Understand appetite and readiness for online Level 7 provision.
3. Explore pedagogical and technical requirements for creative online learning.

**Activities:**

1. Focus groups/interviews with teaching staff (x3 groups across disciplines).
2. Focus group/interviews with students (UG and PG).
3. Survey (short) for wider staff/student reach.
4. Benchmarking review: how comparable creative universities use Blackboard Ultra and deliver online postgraduate degrees, accredited learning and CPD.

**Deliverables:**

1. Stakeholder insights summary (staff and student voices).
2. Benchmarking note (creative HE + online learning sector scan).

**Stage 4: Synthesis & Recommendations**

**Objectives:**

1. Provide actionable recommendations for improving Blackboard Ultra use and applications to CPD provision for commercial provision.
2. Assess feasibility and roadmap for fully online Level 7 programmes.
3. Create strategic guidance for digital learning enhancement.

**Activities:**

1. Thematic analysis of site reviews, interviews, survey, and benchmarking.
2. Drafting of recommendations report.
3. Validation workshop with university leadership/digital learning team to test recommendations.
4. Finalisation of deliverables.

**Deliverables:**

1. Final consultancy report including:
2. Audit findings of current Blackboard Ultra use.
3. Recommendations for better, more consistent use (short-term & long-term).
4. Staff development/training strategy for digital pedagogy.
5. Creative practice integration guidelines (use of media, collaboration tools).
6. Feasibility assessment of fully online Level 7 degrees (including risks, opportunities, required infrastructure, student experience considerations).
7. Executive summary for senior leadership.
8. Presentation of key findings & roadmap.

**Blackboard Ultra Module Site Evaluation Rubric**

**1. Site Structure & Navigation**

* Clear landing page with welcome/orientation information
* Consistent structure across modules (navigation, headings, folders)
* Intuitive organisation of learning materials (chronological or thematic)
* Visible module handbook/outline and key contacts
* Rating: Excellent / Good / Needs improvement

**2. Content & Learning Materials**

* Lecture slides, readings, and resources uploaded in a timely manner
* Use of multimedia (images, video, audio) relevant to creative practice
* Resources tailored to specialist subject needs (e.g., portfolios, design files, creative tools)
* Integration of external platforms/resources where appropriate (Padlet, Adobe CC, Miro, etc.)
* Rating: Excellent / Good / Needs improvement

**3. Learning Design & Pedagogy**

* Learning outcomes clearly linked to activities/resources
* Use of Blackboard tools for active learning (discussion boards, journals, group spaces)
* Opportunities for collaboration, peer review, and critique
* Clear guidance on independent learning expectations
* Creativity embedded in digital pedagogy (not just document repository)
* Rating: Excellent / Good / Needs improvement

**4. Assessment & Feedback**

* Assessment briefs clearly uploaded and accessible
* Transparent marking criteria and rubrics available
* Submission points clearly labelled and functioning
* Timely feedback provided through Blackboard (text, audio, video)
* Opportunities for formative feedback / feedforward
* Rating: Excellent / Good / Needs improvement

**5. Accessibility & Inclusivity**

* Content designed to meet accessibility standards (alt text, captions, headings)
* File formats accessible (no unnecessary scans/images of text)
* Layout uncluttered, consistent, and user-friendly
* Language inclusive and clear for diverse learners
* Consideration of international students & time zones (esp. for online learning)
* Rating: Excellent / Good / Needs improvement

**6. Communication & Student Support**

* Clear announcements used to update students
* Contact information and office hours easily visible
* Active use of discussion boards or Q&A spaces
* Integration of wellbeing/academic support links
* Sense of online community fostered
* Rating: Excellent / Good / Needs improvement

**7. Innovation & Enhancement (Creative Context)**

* Effective use of visuals, design, and layout for creative engagement
* Use of digital tools for showcasing work (e-portfolios, galleries, media collections)
* Opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaboration online
* Evidence of experimentation with new Blackboard Ultra features
* Relevance to possible online postgraduate delivery
* Rating: Excellent / Good / Needs improvement

**Blackboard Ultra Site Evaluation Scoring System**

**Scoring Scale (per item)**

4 = Exemplary – Exceeds expectations, highly effective, could be showcased as good practice

3 = Good – Meets expectations, generally effective with only minor improvements needed

2 = Needs improvement – Inconsistent, lacks clarity, several issues limit effectiveness

1 = Poor / absent – Missing, ineffective, or creates significant barriers to learning

**Category Weights**

Category Weight (%) Notes

1. Site Structure & Navigation 15% Foundation for usability

2. Content & Learning Materials 15% Bread-and-butter content provision

3. Learning Design & Pedagogy 20% Core driver of quality in creative HE

4. Assessment & Feedback 15% Key to student outcomes & satisfaction

5. Accessibility & Inclusivity 10% Baseline compliance and equity

6. Communication & Support 10% Builds community, reduces isolation

7. Innovation & Enhancement 15% Especially important for creative disciplines and online readiness

**Scoring Process**

Rate each sub-item within the 7 categories using the 1–4 scale.

Average the sub-scores to give a category score (out of 4).

Multiply each category score by its weight.

Add all weighted scores to get a final score (out of 4).

Convert to percentage if preferred.

Interpretation of Final Score

3.5 – 4.0 (87–100%) = Exemplary → Consistently excellent, model site, ready for online scaling.

2.8 – 3.4 (70–86%) = Strong → Solid design, some refinements needed, good candidate for sharing practice.

2.0 – 2.7 (50–69%) = Developing → Functional but patchy, requires targeted staff support/training.

1.0 – 1.9 (≤49%) = Weak → Inadequate, risks student experience, urgent intervention needed.

**Emerging Themes and Hidden Assumptions**

**Themes**

1. **Quantitative vs. Qualitative Metrics**:

Balancing numerical data with subjective insights to capture the full scope of learning outcomes.

1. **Creative-Specific Needs**:

Addressing the tactile, collaborative, and iterative nature of creative arts education.

1. **Hybrid Learning Models**:

Exploring the balance between online and in-person and hybrid learning to optimize engagement and satisfaction.

**Hidden Assumptions**

1. **Engagement Equals Satisfaction**:

Assuming high participation rates directly correlate with user satisfaction.

1. **Standard Metrics Apply Universally**:

Presuming that traditional metrics like quiz scores are sufficient to evaluate creative learning.

1. **Technology Can Replicate Studio Learning**:

Believing that digital tools can fully substitute the hands-on experience of studio-based education

**Investigative Questions**

1. **User Satisfaction**:

How do satisfaction levels vary across different course types (e.g., Undergraduate, Postgraduate, CPD vs. short courses)?

1. **Engagement Drivers**:

What specific features of Blackboard VLE drive the highest engagement rates, and why?

1. **Creative Process Measurement**:

How can qualitative aspects like emotional engagement and creative process be effectively measured in online environments?

1. **Collaboration in Virtual Spaces**:

What role does collaboration play in fostering creativity, and how can virtual platforms support this?

**Strategies for Improvement**

**Existing Practices**

1. **Structured Reflective Journals**:

Encourage learners to document their creative journey using digital tools like blogs or shared documents.

1. **Peer Feedback and Critique**:

Facilitate collaborative reflection through discussion boards or video conferencing.

1. **Portfolio Development**:

Use platforms like Behance or Blackboard Ultra to showcase creative work and reflections.

**Creative-Specific Enhancements**

1. **Visual and Multimedia Integration**:

Incorporate images, videos, and design files to align with creative practices.

1. **Collaborative Tools**:

Utilise platforms like Padlet, Miro, or Adobe CC for group projects and critiques.

1. **Hybrid Models**:

Develop blended learning approaches that combine online modules with in-person studio sessions.

**Evaluation Rubric for Blackboard Ultra**

| **Category** | **Criteria** | **Rating** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Site Structure** | Clear navigation, consistent module design, visible key contacts | Excellent / Good / Needs Improvement |
| **Content & Materials** | Timely uploads, multimedia integration, tailored resources | Excellent / Good / Needs Improvement |
| **Learning Design** | Active learning tools, collaboration opportunities, creative pedagogy | Excellent / Good / Needs Improvement |
| **Assessment & Feedback** | Transparent criteria, timely feedback, formative opportunities | Excellent / Good / Needs Improvement |
| **Accessibility** | Inclusive design, uncluttered layout, international student considerations | Excellent / Good / Needs Improvement |
| **Communication** | Clear announcements, active discussion boards, community building | Excellent / Good / Needs Improvement |
| **Innovation** | Creative engagement, experimentation with features, cross-disciplinary collaboration | Excellent / Good / Needs Improvement |

**Conclusion**

The research plan provides a comprehensive framework for evaluating and enhancing the Blackboard VLE at UCA. By integrating quantitative and qualitative data, addressing creative-specific needs, and engaging stakeholders, the study aims to optimize the platform for CPD and short courses. Future research could explore the long-term impact of VLE on professional development and the feasibility of fully online creative arts programs.

**Fee proposal**

Bidders must provide a fee proposal (GBP) exclusive of VAT and inclusive of all costs and expenses, broken down by the four stages. Bidders must accompany this with a CV evidencing the necessary experience of both Blackboard Ultra and its use within an education setting. Responses must be submitted via the portal by 17/10/25 13:00.

The appointment will be in accordance with the universities standard T&Cs. <https://uca.assetbank-server.com/assetbank-uca/assetfile/56091.pdf>