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| University of the Highlands and Islands, EDU |
| Using Blackboard course templates created by the Educational Development Unit |
| A step by step guide |

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# Quick note about good practice in relation to Blackboard

## Navigation

Aim to provide clear pathways through your content so that students know where to find things. This is particularly important in self-directed learning.

## Clarity and conformity

Be specific about what you are asking your students to do – What, why, by when, how, where and who with is a good starting point as a checklist. Blackboard tools and content areas can be used in many different ways, this flexibility can be great but it can also create variations – for example where learning content is stored or how content is linked to. Aim to be consistent to ensure students can orientate themselves within the learning content.

## Accessibility

Widening access for students, in this context, means providing content that is inclusive. Blackboard has built-in [accessibility features](http://en-us.help.blackboard.com/Learn/9.1_Older_Versions/9.1_2014_and_2015/Student/040_In_Your_Course/040_Accessibility/000_Accessibility_Features), there are steps you can take to ensure the content you add is accessible. [The EDU Quality Guidance for Word](http://staffresources.uhi.ac.uk/support_portal/resources/quality_accessibilty/11.html) provides a quick guide on accessible text, bullet points, hyperlinks and symbols.

# Customising the content of your Blackboard course

To begin editing, ensure that the ‘Edit Mode’ is on. This button can be found at the top right-hand corner of the screen. To customise the look of your course use the teaching styles menu. To reach the teaching styles menu click on Control panel > Customisation and then > Teaching style to reach the menu options described in the sections below.

## Course entry point

The course entry point is where students will find themselves when they open the course. This can be any of the course menu options on the left-hand side. Choose an option from the drop-down menu and submit.

## Course theme

Blackboard provides a range of course themes. When selecting a theme, check that there is good contrast between text and background colours. We recommend using ‘Vista’.

## Menu style

The menu style text and background colour can be changed. We have used purple (to reflect the University branding). .



Figure Screen capture showing menu options for text or buttons options and background and text colour

To select a different colour for either the background or the text, click on the drop down arrow. Select a swatch colour by choosing from the colour preview or inserting a colour value if you are looking for an exact match. The University purple is 562569



Figure Screen capture of teaching style menu options for colours

Ensure that colour contrast guidelines are met to ensure text is legible on coloured backgrounds. It is advised that the [Colour Contrast Checker](http://snook.ca/technical/colour_contrast/colour.html) developed by Snook is used to check colours are compliant.

## Default content view

The content view is what students see in the main content area.



Figure Screen capture of content area with content icons and text

We have chosen ‘Text only’ for a cleaner page. This removes the standard Blackboard content icons. 

Figure Screen capture of content area with text only option selected

## Course banner image

A course banner image can be added to the landing page. The banner will appear on the course entry point. It can be a useful way of providing an instant brand to your course. The image files are stored in the files area and can be uploaded from there.

Note: Blackborad recommends an image size of 480 pixels across by 80 pixels high. The image is set as centred which may not suit all images.

# Creating content areas and folders

Blackboard has a helpful guide to [creating course areas for content](https://en-us.help.blackboard.com/Learn/9.1_Older_Versions/9.1_2014_and_2015/Instructor/090_Course_Content/010_Create_Content/010_Create_Course_Areas_for_Content). Again the way in which content is structured should ensure that students can effectively navigate through the structure to find content. You may choose a content area folder structure based on topics; weeks or other headings. Content area folders can be re-ordered, hidden or deleted. They can be web links or content areas.

Notes:

* When you are creating content the content area will not appear in the menu bar if there is no content in it

## Adding web links

Within the content areas, we recommend using the ‘insert hyperlink’ in the text box as this makes the web link clearly visible as shown in Figure 5.



Figure Screen capture showing a web link inserted as part of the item text

The result of using the web link option from the build content dropdown menu is shown in Figure 6. The web link is embedded in the title text, but it is not always obvious to the student.



Figure Screen capture showing a web link created from the build content drop down menu

# Structuring content areas

The course template includes a set of standard content areas which are available from the navigation panel. Content areas can be added, renamed, hidden or deleted. The standard content areas are listed below.

Table Standard course content menu options

| Heading | Working with the menu options |
| --- | --- |
| Announcements | Click ‘Create Announcement’ (remember you can use formatting, add images, external links and internal links) |
| Staff information | Click on ‘Staff information > Create Contact’ and you’ll find a straightforward proforma to complete. |
| Module descriptor | The format of the official module descriptor might vary from course to course, but essentially, this area of Blackboard lets you give students a link (added, as it is here, as an **Item**) to a hard copy (either a Word document or a PDF) of the descriptor: the documents that details, amongst other things, the learning outcomes and assessments for the course. |
| Module information | May be hidden or may be amended to house the Student Handbook |
| Learning resources | This can be used as the top level of a folder structure with the topic, weekly or other folder structure within the main content area. We have used a session structure as the top level folder structure. |
| Assignments | You can rename this section to reflect the terms most familiar to your students – e.g. Assessments, Tasks. |
| Communication Tools | A range of communication tools are provided in this section including; Discussion boards; Blackboard Collaborate and Wikis. Again decide what is most appropriate for your students in helping them build a presence on Blackboard and work with their fellow students in this online environment |
| External links | If you would like to add an External web link to the navigation panel, simply click on the plus sign at the top of the content area and select Web Link.   |
| UHI Libraries | Clicking on the menu item will open the University’s student Library front page in a new window. |
| Student services | Clicking on the menu item will open the University’s student services front page in a new window.  |
| Essential Student Skills | Clicking on the menu item will open [Essential student skills](http://induction.uhi.ac.uk/) in a new window. |
| ePortfolio link | Here you can choose the most appropriate ePortfolio system:[Mahara](https://uhi-mahara.co.uk/?login)[ProofPositive](http://www.proofpositiveonline.co.uk/EPORTFOLIO/index.jsp?providerID=13)   |

## Creating and editing folders in the course files area

Blackboard has a helpful guide for instructors to [creating course areas for content](https://en-us.help.blackboard.com/Learn/9.1_Older_Versions/9.1_2014_and_2015/Instructor/090_Course_Content/010_Create_Content/010_Create_Course_Areas_for_Content). This gives you all the information you will need to create, edit and delete folders.

## Adding content to the course files area

Once you have created the folders you require to store your learning content and related files, you can then start to add files. Again there is a very helpful guide on [adding files to course files](https://en-us.help.blackboard.com/Learn/Instructor/Course_Content/Course_Files/020_Add_Files_to_Course_Files).

There is also a short video demonstration on [uploading zipped packages to Blackboard](https://www.toolkit.uhi.ac.uk/r/%3Altk%3A13005058) provided by Murdo MacMillan. The majority of learning resources produced by the EDU are created as zipped packages. These can be found in the [UHI Toolkit](https://www.toolkit.uhi.ac.uk/?locale=en) and can be uploaded and used in your course. There are over 350 learning resources available to staff on a wide range of topics.

The Foundation Apprenticeship course templates contain an EDU resources folder which contains a set of activity icons and the image file for the course banner.



Figure Screen capture showing EDU Resources folder in the files area

## Creating content in the content areas

Blackboard also has a helpful guide for instructors to [creating content](https://en-us.help.blackboard.com/Learn/Instructor/Course_Content/Create_Content). This includes a useful section on the types of course content you available.

Figure 8 is an example of a set of top level containers for a course.



Figure Screen capture of Leadership and Management content folders

When you start adding content to these containers they will appear in the navigation panel on the left of the screen, providing quick access (one click) to the learning resources for that session/week. If preferred, you can hide sessions and make them visible to students as the course proceeds.

To add a content area, click the + at the top left of the navigation panel (in edit mode) and select ‘content area’ as illustrated in Figure 9.



Figure Screen capture showing the add content area function

## Using an image file, including the activity icon images.

When you use an image in Blackboard, it will be inserted **in line** with the text.



Figure Screen capture showing the distorting of paragraph line spacing caused by adding an image file

In the example shown in Figure 10, you can see that this distorts the paragraph line spacing for the inline text and the line below.

To change this, select the image by right clicking on it (as shown in Figure 11)



Figure Screen capture showing select the image

Click on CSS on the bottom right of the formatting bar:



Figure Screen capture showing the CSS button in the formatting bar

On the Box tab > Float select **left**.

  

Figure Screen capture showing the float left option in the CSS style menu

The text will now **wrap** around the image:



Figure Screen capture of wrapped text



Figure Another example of text distortion around an image

To display an image on the right of the page, with text wrapped to the left, again, select the image and go into CSS > box and choose right. The text will now **wrap** around on the left side of the image as shown in the image below.



Figure Screen capture showing corrected wrapped text around an image

When you add an image file to a Blackboard page you should add some ‘alternative text’ which will describe the image, for example to those using screen reading software. You will be prompted to add alternative text when you insert an image in Blackboard. In Word you should right click the image and select format and then you will be able to add alternative text (make sure you add this to the description, not the title, field.

For icons, however, our advice is to leave the alt/description field blank.  We’ve tested with some screen readers and it’s best to rely on simply the activity titles for accessibility purposes, otherwise the listener using a screen reader is bombarded with duplicate information, e.g. “Chat room icon… chat room”.

# Using the activity icons

A set of activity icons was agreed for the Foundation Apprenticeship courses. These were created to provide easy navigation and prompts particularly to highlight the different types of learning activities students were expected to undertake. The table below provides a list of icons and a description.

Table List of activity icons with descriptions

| Icon image | Icon description | Icon image | Icon description |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Collaboration icon image | Collaborate | Link icon image | Link |
| Handy hint icon image | Handy hint | Question icon image | Question |
| Reading icon image | Reading | Reflection icon image | Reflection |
| Research icon image | Research |  |  |

The image below shows an example of how these can be used within the content area.



Figure Screen capture showing the use of activity icons within a content area

These icons have also been included in the Word templates created for use in the Foundation Apprenticeship courses.

# Finding and using images in learning resources

[A guide to finding images](http://staffresources.uhi.ac.uk/finding-using-images/index.html) for your learning resources has been created by the EDU. It provides useful information on copyright, examples of image banks and easy to follow steps to ensure you have used and attributed images appropriately.

# Additional links to resources

There’s a wide range of Blackboard support for instructors and students. Including a series of videos - [Blackboard Learn for instructors](https://www.youtube.com/user/BlackboardTV/playlists?shelf_id=2&sort=dd&view=50).