

Committing to innovation at the University of Northampton with Blackboard® Learn Ultra

With accessibility and mobile-friendly design as top priorities, Learn Ultra became the obvious choice.



The University of Northampton (UON) prides itself on breaking the higher education mold and “doing things a little bit differently.” This commitment to innovation has earned the university numerous distinctions, including being the first university in the United Kingdom to be named a Changemaker Campus, an Ashoka designation that recognises colleges and universities with a proven track record of campus-wide excellence for social innovation and changemaking.

INSTITUTION TYPE: 4-YEAR PRIVATE

LOCATION: NORTHAMPTONSHIRE, UNITED KINGDOM

ORGANIZATION SIZE: 12,000+

ANTHOLOGY PRODUCTS:

Blackboard LEARN

We chose Learn Ultra for several core reasons. It’s intuitive, mobile-friendly, device-agnostic, responsive, and accessible.



Rob Farmer

Learning Technology Manager, University of Northampton

UON's innovative spirit underscores the university's approach to providing transformational learning experiences. "UON takes an active blended learning (ABL) approach to teaching and learning," shared Northampton Learning Technology Manager Rob Farmer. "Students learn in small groups and through close interaction between staff and students. Our courses are designed for active learning on- and off-campus, in digitally rich environments that integrate 'live', real-time sessions with activities students can undertake where they like and at the time they choose."

Farmer also noted that UON's commitment to using best-in-class technologies has brought about a fundamental shift in how students consume course content. Three years ago, the number of students accessing content using a mobile device began to outpace desktop users. This fact, combined with a desire for ongoing accessibility improvements, prompted the university to re-evaluate its virtual learning environment (VLE).



Mobile-friendly, accessible design makes Learn Ultra the top choice

After completing a thorough and formal review of VLEs, UON selected the Ultra Course View of Blackboard Learn (Learn Ultra) as the best solution for academic staff and students.

UON found Learn Ultra superior to any other VLE in its mobile responsiveness. From a design standpoint, the UON team appreciated Learn Ultra's simpler, more modern, and less dense look and feel. It was clear to the team that Learn Ultra was designed with mobile devices in mind. It flows and responds well on smaller screens while giving users a consistent experience whether accessed via desktop, laptop, tablet, or smartphone.

"Learn Ultra is Blackboard's answer to the challenges posed by today's students, the majority of whom now access the VLE from a mobile device," said Farmer.

Accessibility was another key feature in UON's decision. Upon completing their VLE review, Farmer and his team found Learn Ultra to be the most inclusive VLE, enabling them to ensure courses are fully accessible to all students—including those living with a long-term illness, impairment, or disability.

"All of our students benefit from accessible content," Farmer said. "While we work hard to meet the 2018 Accessibility Regulations, we believe the benefits and potential stretch well beyond."



Phased rollout elicits a positive response

In transitioning from Learn Original to Learn Ultra, UON employed a cohort-based, three-year rollout plan, beginning with an early-adopter pilot. The following semester, all first-year courses were transitioned to Learn Ultra, and the approach will continue until all courses are moved to Learn Ultra.

Using this phased approach gave UON's academic staff time to attend training, contemplate their course design approach, and thoughtfully create their courses in Learn Ultra. "We purposely did not use Blackboard's course transformer tool," explained Farmer. "We wanted our staff to use this as an opportunity to redesign their course with today's best practices in mind."

Overall, UON's academic staff are reporting high levels of satisfaction. They value the straightforwardness of Learn Ultra, as well as the depth of its functionality. "Our staff like that their courses look cleaner, their content is at most three clicks away, and new features are introduced all the time," said Farmer. "It's amazing to see how quickly Blackboard [now Anthology] is developing Learn Ultra, and we really appreciate the work that Blackboard is doing to keep us up-to-date with the latest developments via the monthly office hours and Blackboard user group webinars."



Looking ahead

UON is currently in year one of the three-year rollout. Farmer and his team will continue to focus their efforts around supporting academic staff as they continue transitioning to Learn Ultra.

The LMS has evolved. **Let us show you how.**

Learn Ultra is critical to the success of this university. We find Learn Ultra the best VLE to support the needs of our innovative and forward-thinking university.



Rob Farmer

Learning Technology Manager, University of Northampton

Products highlighted in this success story:

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