Blackboard

Digital Teaching Symposium 2026

Assessment Playground

Encouraging exploration as part of UWE's assessment strategy



Presented by:

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UWE Bristol | University of the West of England

Introductions

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What we aim to cover

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- Context
- Why an Assessment Playground
- Making it work in Blackboard
- Demo
- Future Plans

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About UWE Bristol

Figures 2024/2025

- 37000 students
- 15000 partnership students
- 4200 staff
- 3 Colleges
- 10 Schools
- 4 campus sites in Bristol



Strategic priorities – assessment

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> Staff will be empowered to take a **solutions-based approach**, in a culture that support agility, openness, the **testing of new ideas** and the learning that this brings.
>
> – UWE 2030 Strategy

> We will design **innovative** and inclusive assessment for learning, and provide all our students with timely and accessible feedback
>
> – Learning and Teaching Strategy

> We will introduce a new and innovative programme team approach, drawing on **expertise** from across the University to enable our students and staff to flourish in what they do best through **collaboration**
>
> – Learning and Teaching Strategy

> **Our people** are what makes UWE Bristol the ambitious and inspiring place that it is. It is through their engagement, values and expertise that we transform futures – with and for our students, communities and across the globe.
>
> – UWE 2030 Strategy



Where did the idea start?

- Teaching staff started experimenting!
- Summative assessment no longer restricted in Blackboard!
- Questions such as:
  - Whose responsibility is it to test the test?
  - Whose responsibility is it to support the event?
  - What has already been tested and we know works?
  - What does the Digital Learning Team offer in this space?



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Why an Assessment Playground?

- Extension of the UWE's people centered approach
- Making effective practice more visible, shareable and scalable
- A cultural shift, making assessment innovation accessible to all staff
- Supports inclusive practice
- Builds staff confidence in using Blackboard
- Continues the repositioning of Blackboard as a space for learning design and pedagogic creativity

Test your assignment before making it available – guiding principles for practice

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UK Quality Code for HE – Principle 11 (QAA, 2026)

Peer-review the assessment Have one or more colleagues check that the task, marking criteria and intended learning outcomes align (along with checks for accessibility, inclusion, bias, etc.)

Test it with a small, representative group Run a low-stakes pilot with students who reflect the likely cohort, such as student representatives, recent completers of the module, or a small volunteer group

JISC Principles of good assessment and feedback (Knight & Ferrell, 2022)

Principle 1: Students need to understand what is required of them and the criteria against which their performance will be judged.

Principle 5: If staff have not seen what students see, they cannot be sure instructions and criteria come across clearly.

Making AI work for students (Office for Students & Advance HE, 2026)

Check alignment, not just security: Testing should confirm both that the assessment is resistant to inappropriate AI use and that it genuinely measures the intended learning outcomes (Chapter 2).

Use ongoing testing for non-secure assessments: If students can use AI during an assessment, maintaining validity is likely to require thorough and ongoing testing, because AI capabilities change rapidly (Chapter 2).

A clear need from academics: a space to test assessments

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University of Aberdeen QA: Guidance for the Delivery of Digital Assessments (2025)

- 26 responses from 11 Schools
- Only 6 of 26 said current policy (Delivery of Digital Assessments) was good enough; 20 said no or unsure.

"Schools will be responsible for ensuring that information regarding (assessments) are communicated to candidates and appropriate settings are applied within the VLE.“

- if staff are accountable for correct settings, they need a way to check them before release.

A "repeated request for clear guidance on how to run digital assessments“

University College Dublin: Outcomes of Consultations with Schools (Stritch, Rehill & Clarke, 2023)

- 36 School consultations
- Quality assurance: academics want to catch display errors, ambiguous questions, timing or access problems, and grading issues before an assessment affects students’ marks.
- Identified a need for clear ownership and escalation routes.

“Many module coordinators were unsure of the process for creating and setting exams.”

“I found there were very high learning costs in learning how to run a timed online MCQ”

“It would be very useful to actually be able to enrol as a 'test student' to run through everything, especially assessment."

Live demo

Future Plans

- Soft Launch November 2026 – full launch Jan 2027
- Develop a stakeholder group to determine workflow standards
- Include opportunities to reflect on inclusion, accessibility and student experience
- Further develop our information infrastructure
- Evaluate use
  - Staff digital confidence
  - Effective assessment solutions





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Any questions?

- Please feel free to reach out after the event:
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#DTS26

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