



a toolkit

for designing collaborative
digital experiences



Introduction

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, our learning environments have become increasingly more digital. As a result, students and staff had to adapt to new ways of teaching, learning and interacting. Even as lectures return to in-person, digital environments and tools remain an integral part of the learning experience at UAL. The gains we have made in this area are incredible, but as we integrate these spaces more deeply into our practice we need to consider the student voice and how they wish to use these tools for personal and collaborative work. This report provides that insight as well as practical suggestions to get started.

The toolkit

The toolkit aims to help UAL (University of Arts London) educators design digital spaces and activities that fulfil student expectations and support collaborative learning. It recommends several key ways UAL educators can incorporate new practices and tools into their teaching. All the toolkit's recommendations are derived from a focus group of 12 Design School undergraduate and postgraduate students across multiple courses.

Aims of the toolkit

The key aim of this toolkit is to bridge the gap between students' needs in collaborative digital learning environments and the ones designing those environments. From there, UAL educators can assess their own digital skills and familiarity with UAL tools and decide for themselves how to implement the recommendations from this toolkit. We have specially formulated reflective questions based on the insights from our focus group to help staff achieve this. Furthermore, the toolkit aims to achieve the following aims:





UAL Collaborative Digital Tools

This sections outlines the main collaborative digital tools that are available to UAL.

Moodle

Moodle is the main virtual learning system at UAL that helps educators and staff organise and structure learning. Students use the system as a go-to platform for course information, resources and submissions. Within Moodle, there are several other collaborative digital tools.



Glossary



Moodle Glossary

The Moodle Glossary can function as a crowd-sourced collection of terms and definitions; or an index of concepts, scenarios, case-studies or other diverse contributions. Glossaries are straightforward ways of getting your students to show their understanding of the meanings of different terms and relate applied knowledge and skills.

To understand this tool better, watch our video on the [Moodle Glossary \(Panopto\)](#).



Forum



Moodle Forum

Forums are used for exploring topics in depth and creating threaded discussions. They can also be used for collaboration if groups of students work together in their own discussion threads. In other words, you could create a forum which has in effect multiple 'channels' split by group membership or by the specific question being asked. That way students could either be assigned a specific forum discussion thread or they could self-organise into groups by choosing which question/channel to participate in.

To understand this tool better, watch our video on [Moodle Forums \(Panopto\)](#).



u! moodle

Introduction

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Moodle Wikis

Mental health in distance and online learning

Whether in-person or online, the experience of higher education can trigger mental health difficulties in students; however, distance and online learning have higher rates of mental health conditions disclosure. For example, in 2017-18, 7.8% of students studying at the Open University in the UK disclosed a mental health condition, compared to the UK HE average of 2.02% (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2017), and there is a +16 percentage point gap in mental health disclosure for students (The Open University, 2018), compared to the sector average of +4 percentage points (Office for Students, 2018).

This does not mean that there is a causal link between online education and poor mental health, or even between on-campus and positive mental health outcomes. Indeed, it strongly suggests that recognizing the differences between both modes of learning could help us make changes to the design of online learning environments and courses that positively impact student wellbeing.

The authors of this study explored barriers and enablers to wellbeing in higher education, in the particular context of distance learning and created a 'toolkit' that can be useful to educators who teach fully or partly online courses. **Barriers** were defined as anything that had caused or triggered an issue with mental health; **enablers** were defined as anything that facilitated a sense of wellbeing.

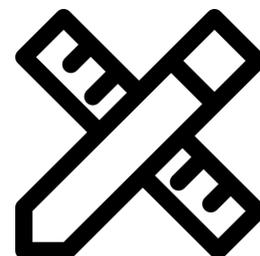
The authors also adopted the WHO definition of mental health, or 'a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community' (WHO, 2014).

This intervention to distance learning students and 6 tutors, conducted a thematic analysis of the data and identified barriers and enablers across three different aspects of the study: study-related barriers/enablers, social-related barriers/enablers, and environmental barriers and enablers, now discussed below.

Moodle Wiki

The Moodle Wiki is a collection of web pages that anyone can edit. Depending on how you set it up, Moodle Wikis can be collaborative or independent, allowing individuals to compose their own pages, work in groups, or together as a class. A collaborative Wiki lets students add new pages, connect pages together, and edit existing ones. As a result, you end up with a fully formed resource that everyone shares ownership over. Students and tutors can even view the Wiki's history to see what has been contributed and by whom.

To learn more about the Moodle Wiki tool, read [this article about using the tool for collaborative sharing and editing.](#)



Moodle Workshop

Moodle Workshop allows student-to-student feedback, self-evaluation and tutor feedback. It is essentially a type of assignment split into three stages that allows students to submit their work and receive peer feedback twice before the tutor assessment. To put it simply, a student might upload a draft of their work in October and get feedback from another student, then upload an edited copy again in November and receive more feedback, until finally they upload in December and the tutor grades the assignment. Thus, it does enable more collaborative interactions.

To find out more about this tool, check out [this article and video on the Teaching Hub.](#)



ual: workflow

Workflow

Workflow is an e-portfolio tool. Students can curate pages of content with images, videos, or other media up to a total of 2GBs. They can then combine those pages into collections or an e-portfolio of work.

Students can't collaborate on the same page, but they can share their work and together create a shared e-portfolio. They can also support each other's work with comments and feedback. Workflow is best used when groups of students work independently and then combine their work into a single collection or a collaborative artefact.

To understand this tool better, watch our video on using [Workflow \(Panopto\)](#).



Collaborate ULTRA

Collaborate ULTRA is a web conferencing system that is used within UAL for online classes. Educators use it for presenting lectures or tutorials. Students can also be separated into smaller breakout groups for collaborative activities. In breakout rooms, session participants can share content on their screens, edit a shared whiteboard, or annotate a series of slides. They can then present this work back in the main session rooms after the tutor ends the breakout groups.

To learn more about BBCollab, watch the [Collaborate Ultra Overview \(Panopto\)](#).

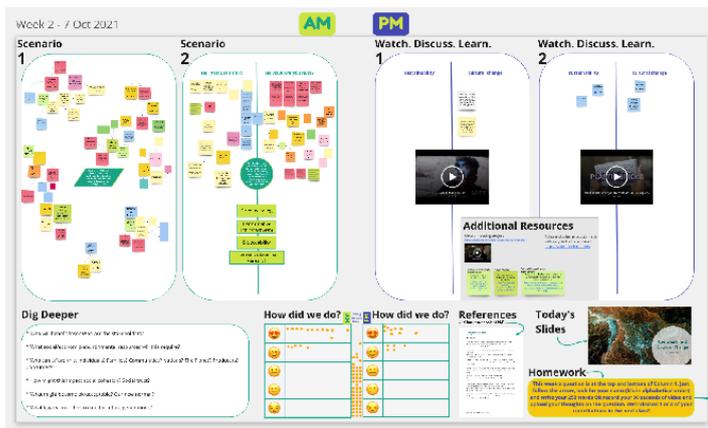


Fig. 1 A weekly activity board created by Stacey Leigh Ross in 21/22 Design Management and Change

Miro

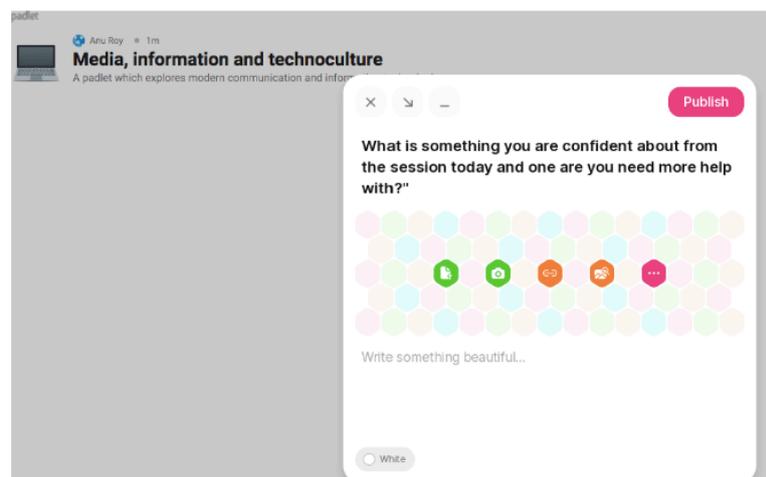
Miro is an online whiteboard space that allows users to create boards full of text, images, embedded videos, documents, icons, comments, and much more for collaborative working. It features live cursor tracking to mimic the effect of working side by side even when everyone is apart. Other apps can be integrated within Miro, allowing for a centralised collaborative experience. You can also split the board up into multiple sections, allowing each group to have their own designated space for collaborative working.

To learn more about Miro, check out [this article on how to use Miro in your teaching.](#)

Padlet

Padlet is an online noticeboard that allows staff to create boards that can house columns of content, whether that be text, media or links, from multiple users. Together, students can source and share information on a Padlet board and even provide feedback and support for each other's contributions.

To learn more about Padlet, check out [this article on 3 creative ways to use Padlet.](#)





Focus Group Insights

Key insights from the student focus group at London College of Communication, UAL helped inform and structure the development of the toolkit.

As mentioned, this toolkit is derived from a focus group conducted with 12 students from the Design School at London College of Communication. Three key insights were obtained as a result of the focus group and have helped structure the toolkit. The three insights concern both asynchronous and synchronous learning within collaborative digital learning environments.

1

Centralised vs diversified digital tools and spaces

2

Individual vs shared spaces

3

Peer vs tutor interaction

The following sections define these three themes and how they help educators better understand what students want from collaborative digital learning environments. They also provide complimentary tool recommendations. In addition, each section contains reflective questions and considerations to help you plan future collaborative digital learning activities in collaboration with students.



Centralised vs diversified tools

Centralised tools are considered to be a single touch point for students. Diversified tools are to be complimentary but distinct tools that each serve their individual purpose.

Centralised

Concentrating your materials and activities within one digital space can help students locate resources and encourage peer-to-peer learning, feedback and collaboration. In this scenario, both synchronous and asynchronous learning would take place within one centralised platform, with resources and activities embedded within it.

This can be done using platforms like MIRO that allow creators to set up boards for collaborative and individual working as well as displaying useful resources, for example Panopto videos, images, PDFs and YouTube videos. Consolidating your content in one panoramic space has the added benefit of showing learners an overview of their whole learning journey throughout the course.

Diversified

If multiple digital tools are used over the course of a unit such as Miro and Padlet, it is important for them to be complimentary and interdependent. This would allow for a smooth collaborative process between class peers and tutors, as resources would be easier to locate as well as understand if they are interconnected, like a Panopto video in a Moodle resource.

This is the same for both synchronous and asynchronous learning as it is important for the spaces to be complimentary and have a relation to the tools and spaces used in order to optimise the learning journal of the student and the flow of the unit.

Tools

Centralised tools are;

- MIRO: As an interactive and collaborative platform, Miro boards can be used as a hub for resources and activities as well as a space where students have more control over their learning and learning materials.
- MOODLE: As the primary UAL platform, Moodle can be used also be used as a hub for collaborative activities such as Moodle Forums, Workshops, Glossaries or Wikis.
- PADLET: Padlet boards are excellent spaces for sharing materials and participating in social learning activities, but they can also be embedded directly in a Moodle resource like a book, a page, or a tab display.

Tools

Diversified tools pairings are;

- PANOPTO and MIRO/PADLET: You can embed a Panopto recording directly in your Miro board, either to give context to a lesson as a lecture recording or to support a learning activity.
- MIRO/PADLET and MOODLE: Moodle can be used as a resource centre for tasks on MIRO. You can upload learning materials and readings to Moodle and students can use these to complete assignments on the class Miro board.



What digital tools am I familiar with as a tutor?

Consider the digital tools you already know and use. What tools are your students already using and how are they using them?



How do students want to interact with multiple digital tools?

Ask your students what they want from their digital tools and spaces and which ones they find valuable for independent and collaborative learning.



How do students want to interact within each other?

Ask students how they like to work individually and in groups. Their answers might help you find the right platform. For example, Miro is great for mind-mapping, whereas a private Moodle forum is ideal for drafting a group essay.



What if students could choose the learning environment?

Focus group research shows that not all students want all their learning concentrated in one digital space. Ask your students, do they want everything to go through Moodle or do they want different spaces for different purposes?



Individual vs shared spaces

Individual spaces are spaces where students can work and develop their own projects whereas shared spaces are where students can collaborate and interact regularly.

Collaborative

Shared tools and environments are ideal for ideation activities and often give rise to further collaborative opportunities. Shared spaces enable students to work together synchronously and asynchronously while also providing a visual overview of their individual and group learning development.

Platforms such as MIRO provide such a space, as students can collaborate in real-time including by uploading documents, embedding videos, posting notes and stickies, creating illustrations, collective storyboarding, adding comments to each other's work, and pooling resources.

Individual

Individual spaces to work on projects allow students to express their creativity and learn to communicate ideas.

They can be created within MIRO through the usage of frames/boards. This would allow for a flexible usage of tools for students to develop ideas, be creative in showcasing their work and also do peer-to-peer reviews across the entire board. This can also be done in Padlet by creating individual columns for each student. However, students find Padlet to be more of a formal tool, meaning that it is good for structured tutor feedback or writing tasks, rather than a tool to produce creative work

Tools

Centralised tools are;

- MIRO: A Miro board can function as a highly collaborative shared space for projects due to its real-time interactive nature, and can centralise information and collaborative learning journeys.
- PADLET: Padlet can also function as a shared space, but its interface is less flexible and it does not create the same sense of real-time interaction and presence like Miro does, but it is often a good choice for new users.
- MOODLE WIKI: Wiki can be used to create interlinked collaborative and informative resource pages.
- MOODLE FORUM: Forums can be used to create multiple collaborative discussion threads.

Tools

Tools for independent work;

- MIRO: Miro boards can be split into multiple sections allowing students to work independently but also receive feedback and comments from peers and tutors.
- PADLET: Padlet boards are another space for students to organise their research and thoughts in a way that is meaningful to them, though it is less flexible than Miro.
- WORKFLOW: In Workflow, students can create a series of pages and assemble them into a single e-portfolio of work. Tutors and other students can provide comments and feedback.



What digital tools am I familiar with as a tutor?

Consider the digital tools you already know and use. Could any of them be used for collaborative learning? Could any of them help students organise their own private thoughts and research?



How do students want to interact with each other?

Ask your students what types of collaboration they find beneficial in digital environments.



How do your students approach individual and collaborative assignments differently?

Ask your students to gain an understanding of how they want their learning journey to take form.



What kind of feedback or support do students want from each other?

Ask your students how they want to interact and learn from others, and what kind of support they want to receive from each other.



Peer vs tutor interaction

Interaction between peers or between students and their tutors is a broad area that can be facilitated in many ways depending on the purpose of the interaction.

Peer-to-peer interaction

Peer-to-peer interaction is a crucial element of learning and collaborative work, but to be effective students need to be able to provide quick and easy feedback as well as establish systems for communication.

Platforms such as MIRO and Padlet both provide spaces that can be used for this type of collaborative activities. Having a space where everyone can contribute, interact and feedback to each other would enable students to collaborate easily and foster peer-to-peer learning as well.

Collaborate Ultra also enables peer-to-peer interaction, either through the use of breakout groups in live classes or by setting up Open Collaborate activities where students can meet group members online outside classtime.

Peer-tutor interaction

Depending on whether the digital learning experience being centralised or diversified in terms of learning spaces, peer-tutor interaction can help normalise constructive feedback and the development of their learning journey.

Platforms such as Padlet provide an easy structured layout for students to upload their work and receive feedback, allowing them to see who the author is and reply in-line.

Tools

Peer-to-peer tools;

- MIRO/PADLET: Miro can be used as a shared collaborative space where students can work in real-time and see others' contributions. Padlet can provide the same but in a more formal structured layout that can be limiting.
- MOODLE WORKSHOP: Workshop can be used for peer feedback on early drafts before a final, summative assessment from the tutor.
- MOODLE FORUMS: Forums can be used to create interesting peer discussion threads.
- Moodle Wiki/Glossary: Both can be created in collaboration, resulting in a resourceful and informative databases.
- COLLABORATE ULTRA: Additional rooms can be set up for students to use to collaborate and work on projects.

Tools

Peer-to-tutor tools;

- MIRO/PADLET/WORKFLOW: Educators can use both platforms to conduct individual interaction with students and engage in feedback sessions.
- MOODLE WORKSHOP: Workshop can be used for tutor feedback on early drafts before a final, summative assessment.
- MOODLE FORUMS: Forums can be used as a discussion thread between students and tutors for interesting and critical discussions.



What digital tools am I familiar with as a tutor?

Consider your familiarity with UAL's digital learning tools.



How do students want tutors to interact with their work?

Ask students to gain an understanding of how they want to interact with tutors in terms of their learning development.



How do students want their peers to interact with their work?

Ask students to gain an understanding of how students want their peers to interact or collaborate with their work.



What if students could choose how to interact with each other and tutors?

Ask students what kind of social and learning engagements they want from their digital learning environments.