

Moodle 2 for OER: the good, the bad and the ugly
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Abstract

Moodle 1.9 is no longer being actively developed. By July 2012 it will reach end-of-life meaning that even serious security issues will no longer be addressed. All sites, whether for paying students or Open Educational Resources, hosted on Moodle 1.9 (and earlier) should be working on a migration plan.

This poster session will look at the way the Open University of the United Kingdom tackled the problem for their student-facing systems and LearningSpace OCW site, both of which were based on the same heavily-customised Moodle 1.9 platform.

We will briefly cover how we assessed alternative platforms, looking at how well they implement our required functionality and the cost of migration. We continue to wish to use open technologies, and to manage LearningSpace in a sustainable way based on mainstream activities.

We will share our thoughts on what's good, bad and downright ugly about Moodle 2 for OER, looking at everything from support for licence choice and other IP issues, publishing RSS feeds, support for peer-to-peer learning, search engine optimisation, ease of re-use, support for ratings and reviews, activity tracking, self-assessment, flexibility of structuring materials, mobile learning, support for content authoring and management...

We hope the audience will share their experiences as well. We wish to continue to collaborate with other educational institutions and the Moodle community to improve Moodle 2 so that it better meets the needs of OER. Our aim is that as a result of this presentation we will have a better picture of the problems facing not just the OUUK but the wider OER Moodle community. We hope to gather offers of help in any of the following areas: setting requirements, developing code, testing, translating or documenting new features. These can be taken to the core Moodle development team help us make better progress together.

Keywords

Moodle, technology, platform

Details

In a project lasting just over a year, the Open University UK has moved its virtual learning environment from a heavily customized Moodle 1.9 platform to Moodle 2. In order to make such upgrades easier in future, we have adopted a “no core customizations” approach and found alternatives which fit better in the modular plug-in methodology while still delivering the same, or broadly similar, functionality to our users. This new platform is being rolled out during 2012 to students and course teams as new presentations begin.

With that work completed, we can now turn our attention to a range of other Moodle 1.9 platforms which run the same codebase as our student VLE. LearningSpace, which is a part of the [OpenLearn](#) offering providing our OpenCourseWare materials, is the first platform to be considered.

The first phase of work considered the range of functionality that the OUUK felt was important to LearningSpace and compared this against a number of content and learning management platforms. We used a similar approach to the [OCWC's platform comparison grid](#) (the OU-Moodle column in this grid currently refers to Moodle 1.9) giving consideration to the following aspects of the platforms:

- publishing RSS feeds and other linked data and metadata export formats
- support for peer-to-peer learning and collaborative activities
- search engine optimization
- ease of re-use
- support for ratings and reviews
- support for sharing learning pathways
- activity tracking and certificates of participation
- self-assessment
- flexibility of structuring materials
- mobile learning
- support for content authoring and management

The key driver for the OUUK is for the production process to be as streamlined as possible after materials are created for our students. We have therefore chosen to retain a Moodle platform for our OpenCourseWare content.

In making our analysis, we have gained our own impression of what Moodle 2 does well, badly and doesn't support at all as an OpenCourseWare platform.

The Good:

- support for peer-to-peer learning and collaborative activities with shared user profiles and a range of learning activities;
- support for ratings and reviews through polls and surveys;
- support for sharing learning pathways through course tagging and url sharing;
- activity tracking and certificates of participation through log reports and the certificate module;
- self-assessment through quiz activity;
- mobile learning through mobile-optimised themes; and
- ease of re-use through backup sharing and the MOOCH community hub (though it would be nice to share back-ups in other formats).

The Bad:

- Support for license choice exists but is not linked throughout the platform and license choice does not have any impact on controlling access to content.

- Courses can be structured flexibly with custom categories, but a course can only exist in a single category; also course layouts are generally linear.
- Support for content authoring and management is present, but tools for applying consistent course presentation for every course are lacking.

The Ugly:

- There is limited metadata held about courses and no support for publishing course information as RSS feeds, or other linked data or metadata export formats; if such feeds are added, it is difficult to display links to them within the site and to display the extra course metadata in course browse and search links.
- Search engine optimization advice suggests that keyword-rich urls are critical to good search rankings, but Moodle does not offer any way to swap to a 'friendly' url structure.

As we enter a phase of developing Learningspace on Moodle 2, we hope to work on improving some of these aspects of Moodle. We also hope to benefit from the experience of others interested in Moodle 2 as an OCW or OER publishing platform, particularly if you disagree with our analysis of the good, the bad and the ugly and have suggestions for workarounds or code to share.

We wish to continue to collaborate with other educational institutions and the Moodle community to improve Moodle 2 so that it better meets the needs of OER. Our aim is that as a result of this poster session we will have a better picture of the problems facing not just the OUUK but the wider OER Moodle community. We hope to gather offers of help in any of the following areas: setting requirements, developing code, testing, translating or documenting new features. We will liaise with the core Moodle development team help us make better progress together.

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