<u>Exec Summary for the Report on the Findings of a Survey about "Blackboard".</u>

This survey was initiated by the College of Science Officer, Connor Muir, in the academic year of 15/16 in response to conversations held with colleagues in the College of Science. Working with the other College Officers and the Vice President Academic Affairs, the survey was carried out from March to May and received a response rate of 26% from students across all areas of the University. The survey was carried out in order to investigate the awareness of students when it came to Blackboard, manage their expectations of this and finally whether our students would be willing to use their devices for their learning – if they owned them.

Blackboard is a core element of the student learning experience whilst at the University. There are a number of functions that can be utilised by both staff and students to maximise the effectiveness of this tool. Some work was already being carried out looking into the set-up of various sites on Blackboard but there was nothing currently showing how or why students used different functions, nor what students were really after.

The method in which content is delivered to students has changed dramatically over the last decade and will continue to do so in the coming years. There are already a number of tools in that area available for use to develop a digital learning environment within the classroom. This survey aimed to consider if there was a desire from students to engage in digital teaching and learning.

(Further comments and anonymised data can be made available to staff by requesting to jdickie@lincoln.ac.uk).

<u>Key Recommendations</u>
- For the University to form a Working Group, to investigate how the overall experience of students on Blackboard can be used and how it's full use of functionality can be explored.
- For the University to investigate and introduce the use of devices for interactive learning in the College of Science, with a view to roll out across the University.

- For the University to create guidance and policies for staff on this development in digital learning and advise how to deliver and allow fair usage of such technology. Additionally, the training of staff for this kind of teaching needs to be considered and delivered centrally to ensure that it is implemented correctly.
- For the University to create a policy and guidance document for students on this development in digital learning to support them to understand their usage and its impact.

<u>Report on the Findings of a Survey about "Blackboard".</u>

During the academic year of 16/17, the College of Science Officer was keen to collate some research on current students' awareness of different aspects and features on Blackboard. Additionally, he was keen to investigate whether the use of certain software or apps – which is present in some schools within the College – would be encouraged by students to take place in a wider range of schools. When discussing this with his fellow College Officers and the Vice President Academic Affairs, it was decided that this information would be useful for students across the University rather than just the College of Science.

The questions for each were created by the College of Science Officer in consultation with members of staff within the College of Science, Educational Development Enhancement Unit (EDEU) and the Student's Union (SU). Due to the small number of questions for each area of investigation, they were merged and formed one short survey of 11 questions – ranging from frequency of use, awareness of apps and what devices were owned.

The survey was hosted on the Students' Union website, using the Students' Union Management System (SUMS), and was promoted by the College Officers, School Representatives and the Vice President Academic Affairs through Social Media and GOATing. Additionally, it was advertised by colleagues in EDEU, School administrators and using email communications from the Students' Union. It was originally opened just before Easter in March, but remained open and promoted until the end of the Module Evaluation period in May.

The target response rate was 10% (1471 respondents), and the final response rate was 26% (3948 respondents) across the University. Turnout of each college was as follows:
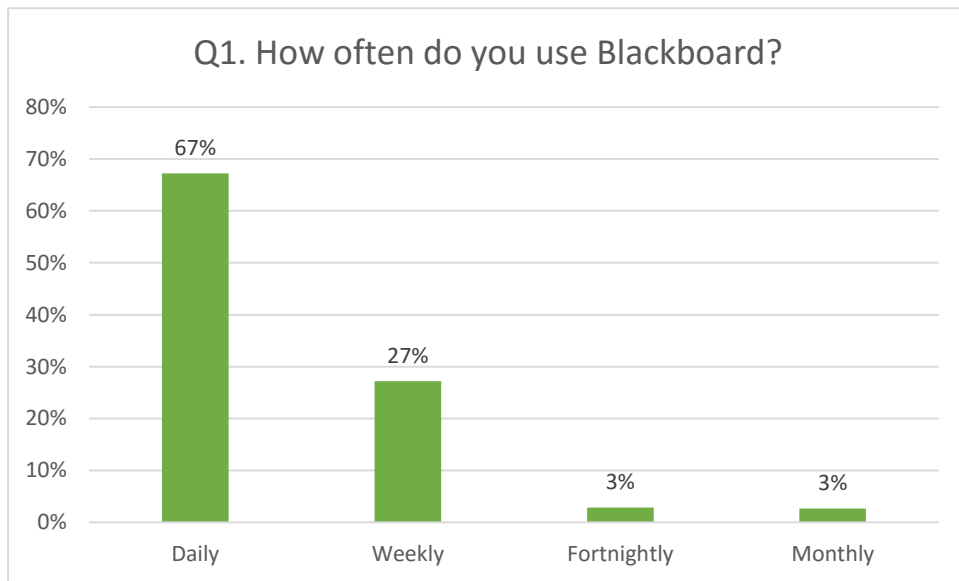- 35% of College of Arts
- 35% of College of Science
- 29 of College of Social science
- 20% of the Lincoln International Business School

It was interesting to see that with this survey we had a higher level of engagement from the National Centre for Food Manufacturing with 20% of students from that department completing the survey. We also received responses from colleagues defined as students within EDEU.
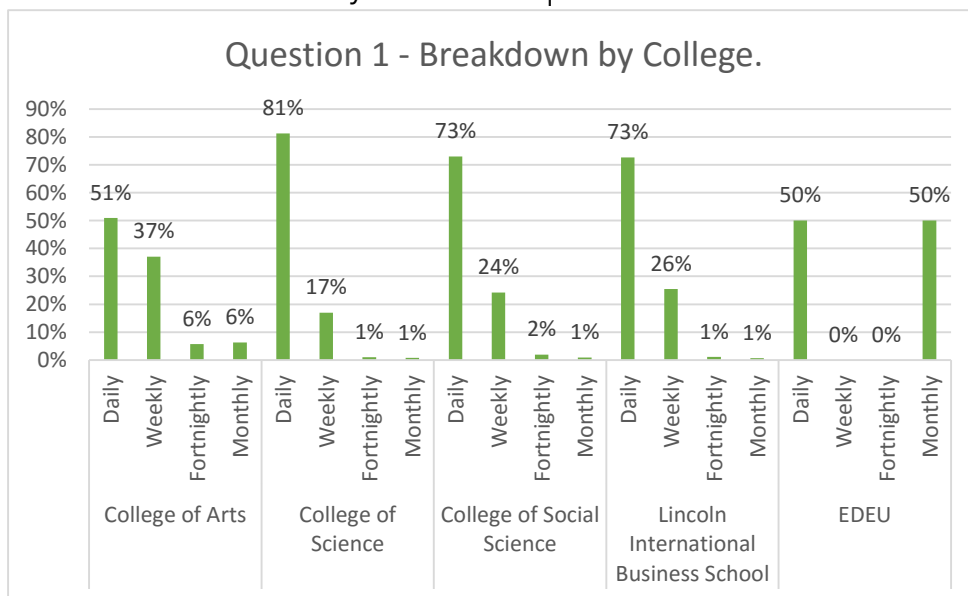
The aim of the survey was to find out whether students at Lincoln were aware of the capabilities of Blackboard and to discover their expectations of what Blackboard should provide them with in comparison to what they are currently given. Secondly, there was an aim to discover whether students owned "smart" devices and would be willing to use these as part of their

academic experience. We hope that the results of this work can be used to inform the future of digital learning here at Lincoln.

Use of Blackboard

Q1. How often do you use Blackboard?

Daily: 67%
Weekly: 27%
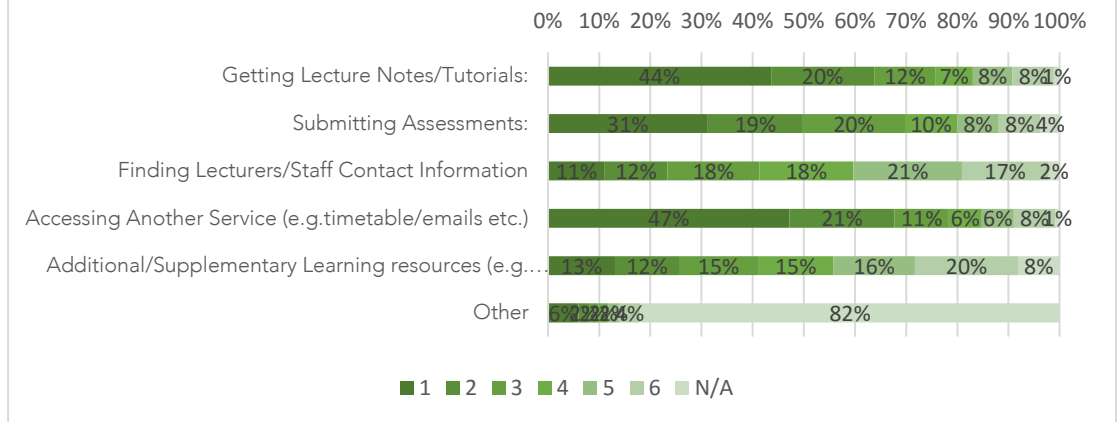Fortnightly: 3%
Monthly: 3%

This chart shows contrary to what people believe, the student body frequently use Blackboard. 94% of respondent's access the virtual learning environment on a weekly or more frequent basis.

Question 1 - Breakdown by College.

College	Daily	Weekly	Fortnightly	Monthly
College of Arts	51%	37%	6%	6%
College of Science	81%	17%	1%	1%
College of Social Science	73%	24%	2%	1%
Lincoln International Business School	73%	26%	1%	1%
EDEU	50%	0%	0%	50%

Across the Colleges, the majority of students do access Blackboard on a daily basis, if not daily then weekly.

Generally speaking, there is a perception that students don't access Blackboard very often. The results from this survey show that this is not the case and indicates that it could be a prime tool to use to communicate with students and should be used more for this.

Q2. With 1 being the most frequent and 6 being the least frequent, please indicate how often you use Blackboard for the following:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A
Getting Lecture Notes/Tutorials:	44%	20%	12%	7%	8%	8%	1%
Submitting Assessments:	31%	19%	20%	10%	8%	8%	4%
Finding Lecturers/Staff Contact Information	11%	12%	18%	18%	21%	17%	2%
Accessing Another Service (e.g.timetable/emails etc.)	47%	21%	11%	6%	6%	8%	1%
Additional/Supplementary Learning resources (e.g…	13%	12%	15%	15%	16%	20%	8%
Other	6%	2%	2%	2%	2%	4%	82%

The most frequent use from our respondents was to use it for "*Accessing Another Service (e.g. timetable/emails etc.)*" (79%). There are different reasons why this is the most common use, linked to how Blackboard is currently used in their area. Comments that were provided for the "Other" option further mentioned the use of Blackboard to access timetables or emails strengthening the evidence shown above. Students may not use Blackboard for its features mentioned due to these not being explored in Schools and therefore are not showing the value of a virtual learning environment or what facilities could be highly useful.

Second most frequent was "*Getting Lecture Notes/Tutorials*" with over half of respondents (76%) using Blackboard for this purpose, an expected result for the basic resource needed for their studies.

The least frequent service provided was for "*Finding Lecturers/Staff Contact Information*". The purpose of this may vary across schools as some may find it easier to contact staff in person, for instance those students who are most likely to contact their course/programme leader if they have an issue will usually already know how to contact them. It may also be the least frequent service due to the information not being easy to find on Blackboard.

'Other' was selected by a small number of respondents, with the majority selecting "*N/A*" as an answer. Some reasons for selecting this included:
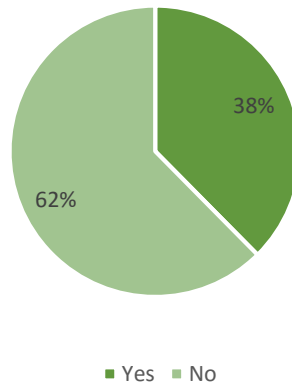*"Notifications and Announcements"*
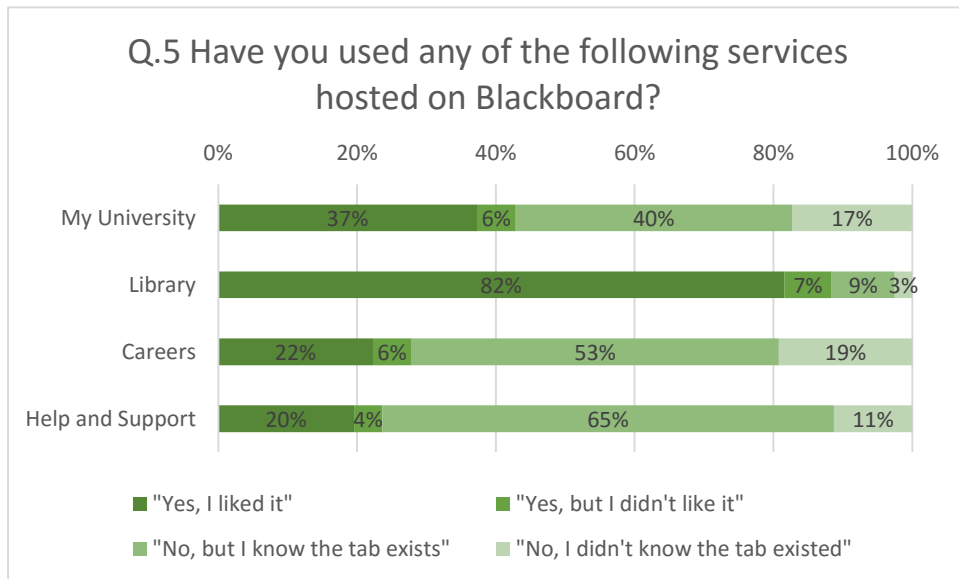*"Workshops"*
Finding dates for lectures"
"Accessing Reading Lists"
"Library Link"

Q4. Did you know that you can customise the My Sites section on the Blackboard Homepage?

38%

62%

■ Yes ■ No

As can be seen in the chart above, the majority (62%) of students were not aware that they can customise the "*My Sites*" area of Blackboard.
A reason for this may be that they do not see any value in changing this. It appears that students don't realise that they can alter the information that they receive from previous modules and not receive as many unnecessary notifications.

Q.5 Have you used any of the following services hosted on Blackboard?

Service	"Yes, I liked it"	"Yes, but I didn't like it"	"No, but I know the tab exists"	"No, I didn't know the tab existed"
My University	37%	6%	40%	17%
Library	82%	7%	9%	3%
Careers	22%	6%	53%	19%
Help and Support	20%	4%	65%	11%

- ■ "Yes, I liked it"
- ■ "Yes, but I didn't like it"
- ■ "No, but I know the tab exists"
- ■ "No, I didn't know the tab existed"

This question was included as there was an interest in discovering what services students found useful when they accessed them through Blackboard.

For "*My University*", only 37% of students had used it and liked it, with a majority of students' not actually using the tab through not wanting to or needing to, or because they weren't aware of it. This tab includes a high level of information of all areas in the University, but because of this some information appears to be buried. For instance, the Extenuating Circumstances link to the portal page holding this information is not very clear and accessible, but this is something which should be accessible here and on every School's Blackboards or Course Subject Site. Likewise, the information for attendance review or academic contention should be widely promoted in these areas to allow for higher awareness.

The "*Library*" site received a positive response in the survey. Over 80% of students liked the service through Blackboard, a further 9% were aware of it but didn't use it and only 3% of respondents weren't aware it existed. Comments in Question three showed that students accessed the Library part of Blackboard, something which is demonstrated in the chart above.
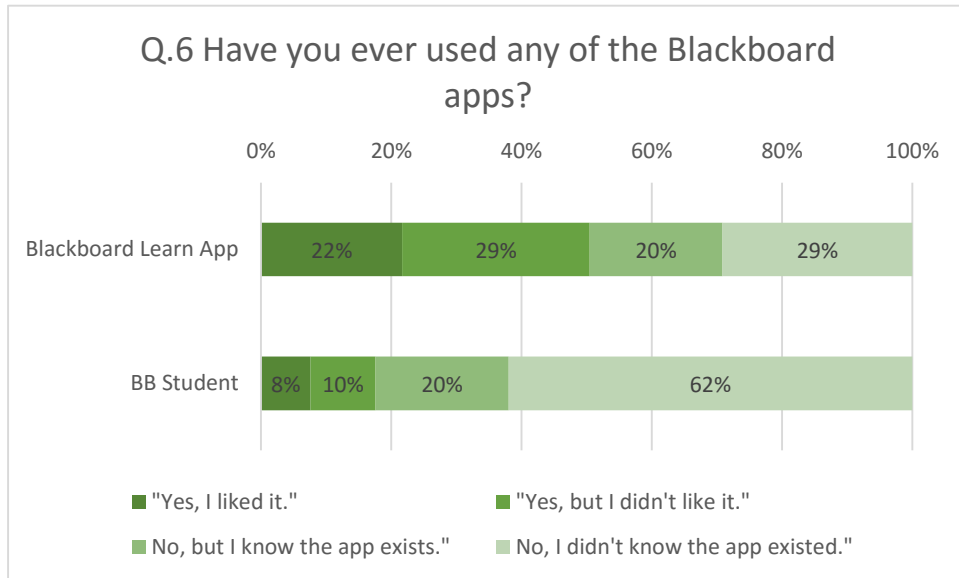
Less than a quarter of respondents liked the tab for "*Careers*", and the majority of respondents (72%) didn't use the tab to access the Careers Service. From research carried out earlier in the academic year for the SU Employability Survey and for the new SU Strategy, we know that Employability is a high priority for students so questions have to be raised as to why students are not accessing this service through this medium when they are frequently using Blackboard.

Likewise, with "*Help and Support*", only 20% of respondents used and liked the tab with a large majority not using it at all. This area holds media depicting how to use Blackboard which can help students, but may not be

accessed due to them using the environment for the basic functions as demonstrated in previous questions. Additionally, this area seems to provide information for students on how to submit assessments which will be very helpful, but also provides the staff version of this information – something which may not be appropriate on a Student Site.

Recommendation: For the University and the Careers Service to review the information held on their tabs on Blackboard in order to have the necessary information available for students on this resource.

Recommendation: For the University to form a Working Group, to investigate how the overall experience of students of Blackboard can be used and how it's full use of functionality can be explored.

Q.6 Have you ever used any of the Blackboard apps?

	0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

Blackboard Learn App: 22% | 29% | 20% | 29%

BB Student: 8% | 10% | 20% | 62%

- ■ "Yes, I liked it."
- ■ "Yes, but I didn't like it."
- ■ No, but I know the app exists."
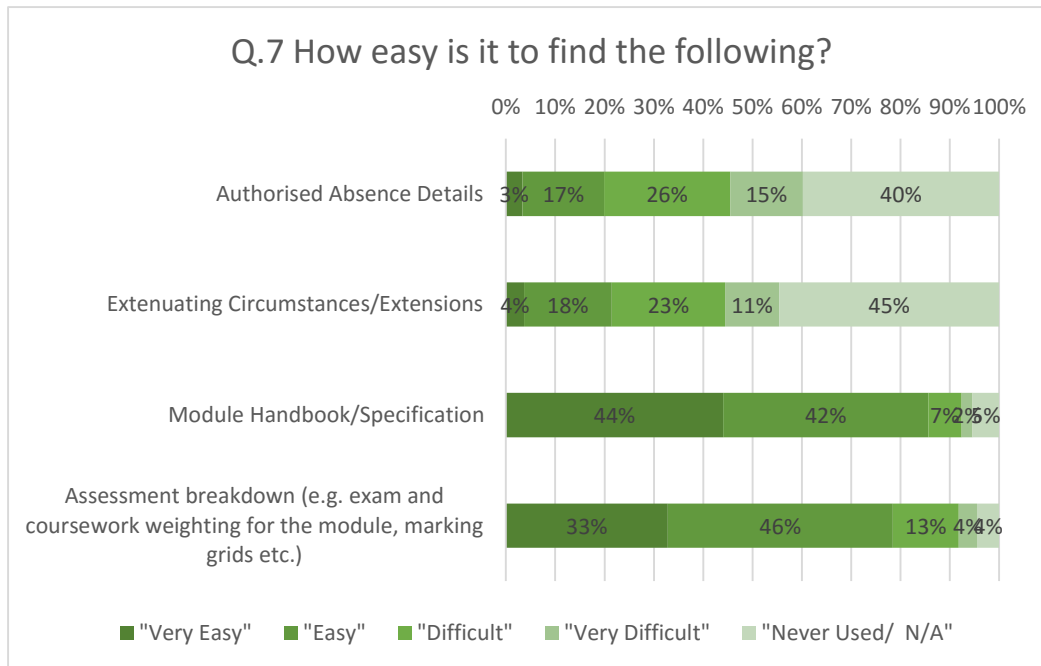- ■ No, I didn't know the app existed."

The purpose of this question was to really understand how students interact with Blackboard as their virtual learning environment, and whether they feel the need to have an app to enable them access the majority of the time.

Survey results show that the respondents are more aware of the *"Blackboard Learn"* app (71%) than of the *"BB Student"* app (38%). However, there were a higher proportion of those who responded that used it that didn't like the app to those who used it and did like it, by 9%.

Those who has used "*BB Student"*, appeared to not like the app for accessing Blackboard, with a 2% difference when compared to those who had used this and liked it.

Recommendation: To review and consult with students about what functions they would utilise a Blackboard App for.

Q.7 How easy is it to find the following?

	"Very Easy"	"Easy"	"Difficult"	"Very Difficult"	"Never Used/ N/A"
Authorised Absence Details	3%	17%	26%	15%	40%
Extenuating Circumstances/Extensions	4%	18%	23%	11%	45%
Module Handbook/Specification	44%	42%	7%	2%	5%
Assessment breakdown (e.g. exam and coursework weighting for the module, marking grids etc.)	33%	46%	13%	4%	4%

For this question, key information was selected from Blackboard to find out if there was generally an ease of access to information which affects all students. These options were: *"Authorised Absence Details", "Extenuating Circumstances/Extensions", "Module Handbook/Specification"* and *"Assessment Breakdown"*.

The first two of these options are information that students may not need to use at any point during their time at University, in comparison with the latter two.

With *"Assessment Breakdown"* and *"Module Handbook Specification"*, over 75% of respondents believe that it is *"Very Easy"* or *"Easy"* to find this information.
For *"Module Handbook/Specification"*, 9% of respondents felt that there was a level of difficulty in trying to access this information, and for *"Assessment Breakdown"* this number was closer to 20%. These areas of information seem to be quite apparent on Blackboard according to our respondents, but we would still push that all students should know where to find this information.

"Authorised Absence Details", is information which should be accessible for all students. Out of our respondents 40% of students had not used this information or not needed to. Out of the remaining 60% of respondents who had accessed this information, only 20% had stated that they had found it *"Very Easy"* or *"Easy"* to access. With more policies present in the University than ever before linking to or mentioning Attendance Monitoring and consequences of non-attendance, this information should be highly visible for students on a resource such as Blackboard.
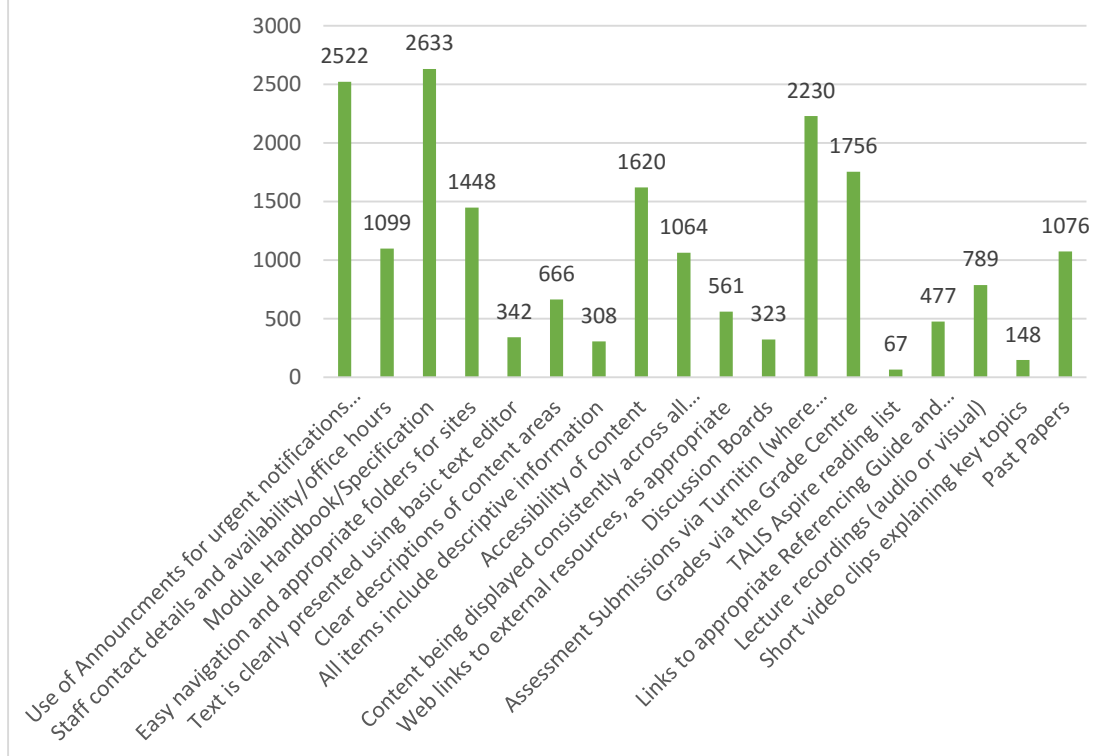
"Extenuating Circumstances/Extensions" results show a similar picture. 45% of respondents have not used or not needed to access this information.

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However, of the 55% who have found it, 22% felt it was "*Very Easy*" or "*Easy*" to access compared to a 34% who felt it was "*Difficult*" or "*Very Difficult*". Again, this is information that students may need which if not completed within a timeframe (or not at all) can lead to further consequences for them and their studies.

At the Students' Union, the experience within our Advice Centre this past year has been that many students do not have access to information regarding process or regulations until it is too late. These areas of Absence or Extenuating Circumstances are something that students need to be aware of and should be as visible – or accessible – as Module Handbooks or Assessment information.

Recommendation: For the University to ensure that each School's Blackboard site has information regarding Authorised Absence Details and Extenuating Circumstances visible and accessible to students.

Q8. What are the top 5 aspects for you to be able to access on Blackboard?

Respondents were able to choose up to 5 options for what they felt were the most important features to them for their use of Blackboard.

The top five were;

- *"Module Handbook/Specification"* with 2633 respondents
- "*Use of Announcements for urgent notifications and reminders"* with 2522 respondents
- *"Assessment Submissions via Turnitin (where appropriate)"* with 2230 respondents
- *"Grades in The Grade Centre"* with 1756 respondents
- *"Accessibility of Content"* with 1620 respondents.

The majority of these top five are features that would be expected to be seen as priority for a student. A module handbook will guide them through that area of the course including information on their assessments. Use of announcements can be used to find out if teaching is still going ahead or for information of opportunities available to students.
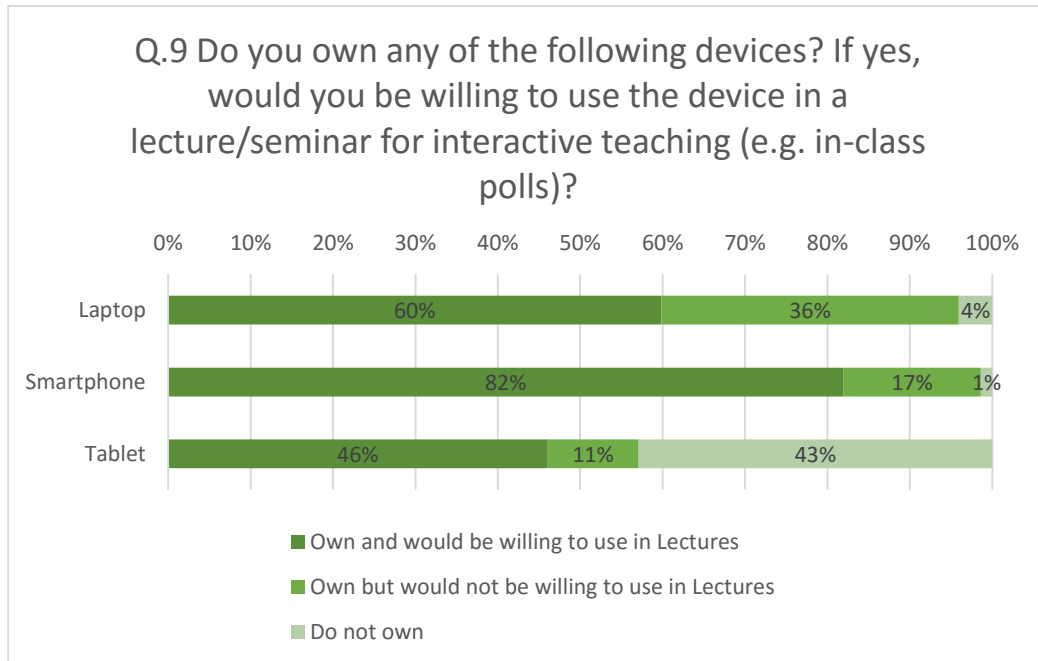
Assessment Submissions is a required feature if the course is in support of online submissions and relatively students will expect if they submit work online then they should receive results and Grades online in the Grade Centre. Our understanding is the not every school makes frequent use of the Grade Centre, instead using the Announcements as the only place for Grade release. Additionally, it is important to note that students tend to want to know their grades before going on to receive feedback for their assessments.

It may be more accessible and useful for students who are not able to open the announcements or to come onto campus to collect results, to make the use of Grade Centre common practice across all Schools.

Accessibility of Content leads back to the previous question about having transparent information for students to access when they need it, as well as having it in forms that can be understood by all students.

Recommendation: For the use of Grade Centre as grade release to be made common practice across all Schools of the University to allow for further move to digital assessment practices and accessibility for students.
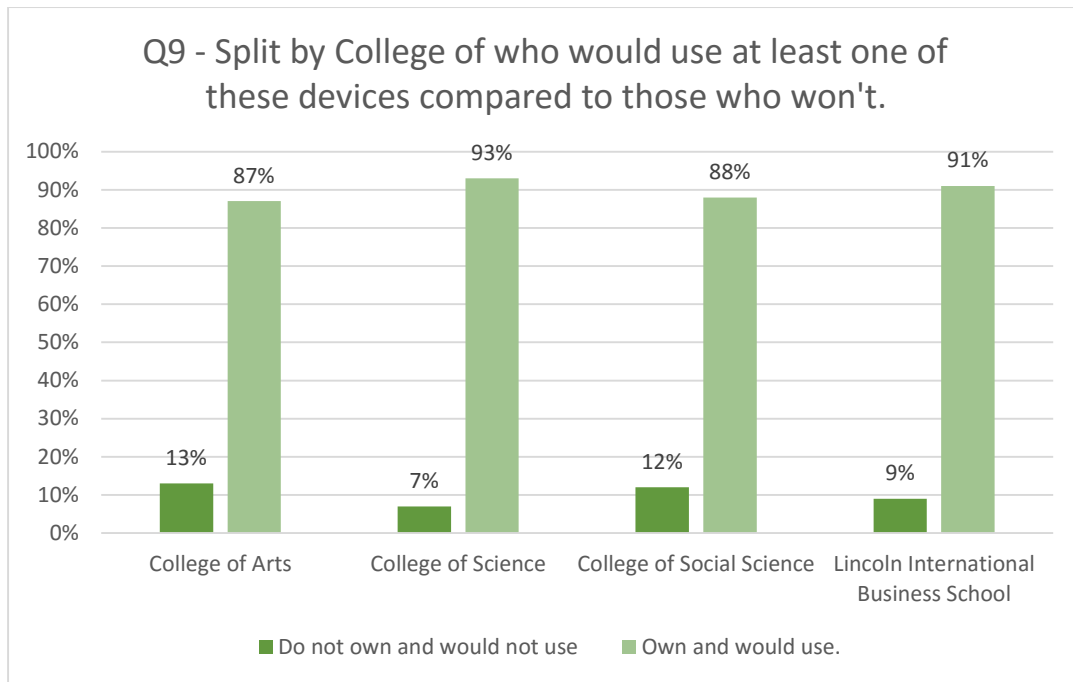
Q.9 Do you own any of the following devices? If yes, would you be willing to use the device in a lecture/seminar for interactive teaching (e.g. in-class polls)?

	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%

Laptop: 60% | 36% | 4%

Smartphone: 82% | 17% | 1%

Tablet: 46% | 11% | 43%

■ Own and would be willing to use in Lectures
■ Own but would not be willing to use in Lectures
■ Do not own

The device that the majority of respondents own is a Smartphone, with 99% stating that they own one. Secondly is a Laptop with 96% of respondents owning one, followed lastly by a Tablet with only 57% of respondents possessing one.
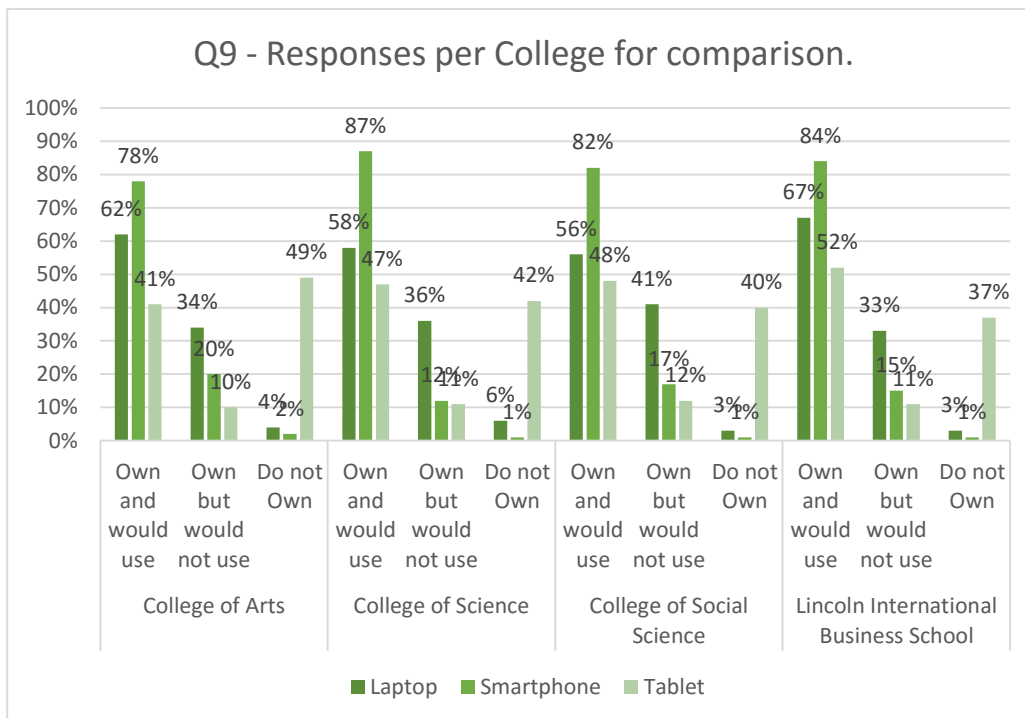
However, not all those who owned a device would be willing to use it for interactive teaching. 82% of respondents would be willing to use a Smartphone in teaching sessions, compared to a 60% who would be willing to use their Laptop during their teaching sessions. Judging from comments provided to Question ten, this is due to ease of a Smartphone compared to a Laptop. Only 46% of respondents would be willing to use a tablet, which is significantly less due to the fact that nearly half of the respondents do not own a tablet.

The chart below, shows the breakdown of students who would not be willing to use a device in each College compared to their peers who would be willing.

Q9 - Split by College of who would use at least one of these devices compared to those who won't.

The chart shows that the majority of Students are willing to use at least one of these devices in Lectures in order to further their interactive learning. For implementation of this type of interactive learning it may be best to start in the College which is showing the least objections, which according to the data, would be the College of Science.

We also thought it would be useful to demonstrate this by showing the breakdown in each College of the willingness to use a device and which device this would be.

Q9 - Responses per College for comparison.

We can see that across all Colleges there are some common results. In each College the Smartphone device seems to be the most practical device that students would be willing to use in teaching with about 80% of each College respondents willing to use this. There is varying opinion on whether they own a device or not willing to use them as part of their learning experience and reasons for this have become clear within the answers to Question 10. If we were to ask students this question again, it would be interesting to see if the reluctant students may change their mind if examples of interactive teaching were available as opposed to thoughts of just using an electronic device in a teaching session.

A point to note is that if this development was introduced within the University, guidelines and policies may need to be created for both staff and students to understand the creation, delivery and usage levels of these interactivities.

Recommendation: For the University to investigate and introduce the use of devices for interactive learning in the College of Science, with a view to roll out across the University.

Recommendation: For the University to create guidance and policies for staff on this development in digital learning and advise how to deliver and allow fair usage of such technology. Additionally, the training of staff for this kind of teaching needs to be considered and delivered centrally to ensure that it is implemented correctly.

Recommendation: For the University to create a policy and guidance created for students on this development in digital learning to understand their usage and its impact.

We asked respondents reasons why if they have a device, would they not be willing to use in this setting. These were some of the comments to show some common themes:

"I feel as though the level of learning and teaching that could be achieved through smartphone or tablet is sufficient to what I expect."
"Tried it and it didn't go well, no internet or phone service etc."
"Lectures are an old method of teaching. We should be looking at a more social aspect of learning through seminars. If the questions asked about using these devices in a seminar, it would be much more appropriate."
"I won't be using any of devices to participate in lectures. I pay £9000 a year therefore I expect to be able to get the most out of lectures without having to own, bring and risk my devices in lectures."
"Just that a laptop can be clumsy to use in lecture rooms due to small desk sizes"
"It's a bit big and the battery doesn't last more than 10 minutes, so would need plugging in."

Finally Question 11:

"<u>Do you have any comments you wish to add?</u>"

Generally, the comments in Question 11 were about options in questions and who were delivering them or about general improvements they would like to see:

"Recording of Lectures uploaded to blackboard would be very helpful."
"There needs to be consistency in how it is used and there just isn't."
"I downloaded the Blackboard app to my phone but I had to delete it due to it never working. It opens and loads but once loaded there is nothing to show."
"Although it is possible to view information in extenuating circumstances easily, it is hard to find any information on attendance, what has been logged or even a basic percentage. Would be useful to have this information to view myself as attendance emails seem to be random rather than systematic."