

Better user experiences, better learning experiences?

Carol Shergold, Head of learning systems

John Davies, Education developer

Stuart Lamour, User experience developer

Paolo Oprandi, Moodle manager

Mark Parsons, E-learning support officer



At Sussex we are interested in the idea that in order for students to have great LEARNING experiences, both students and their tutors need to have good USER experiences with our online learning system.

What we're presenting is our attempt to explore this, focusing on staff members' experiences of the system.



We've been using Moodle as our online learning system since 2005 at Sussex, and its use to support students' learning has become taken for granted and mainstreamed over that time.

There's a lot of positivity about it. But at the same time, people struggled with it, as we've seen from the clip.

We ran a survey of staff in 2007, and there were a number of comments about areas that staff found difficult, and I've pulled out a few about file upload here.

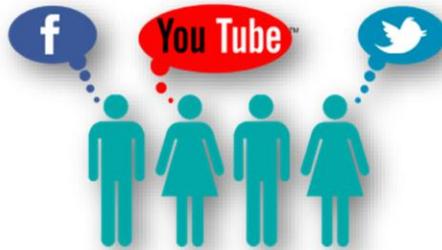
But file upload *is* complex in Moodle. In Moodle 1.9 it requires *nine* separate decision points, which makes it a very extended workflow with plenty of opportunity to go wrong.

In 2009 we took a proposal to senior management to address the usability of our online learning system and were given funding.

We commissioned some usability research from Vertical Slice with a brief to explore how easy our staff found it to carry out a range of common tasks.

We employed a second programmer / developer, Stuart Lamour, with specific skills in user experience and web design. He joined Paolo Oprandi, our Moodle manager and developer.

How can we improve users' experiences?



So how could we improve the usability of our system?

There's a lot on our blog about this <http://blogs.sussex.ac.uk/elearningteam>, which covers a range of approaches that we use at Sussex, such as the use of design patterns.

But in this talk we're going to focus on just one approach which is to listen to users and explore their expectations.

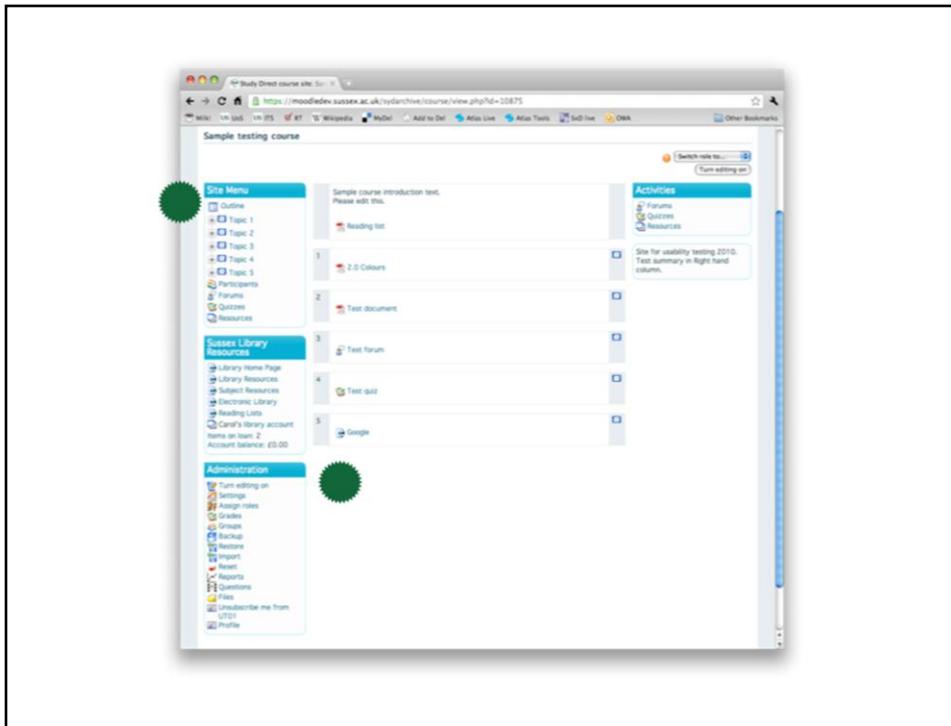
Our users will almost certainly have already interacted with some of major websites such as facebook, youtube, twitter, google, amazon ... And they'll have developed expectations and strategies to handle getting their tasks fulfilled

If we use these expectations to guide us, we can create sites that will feel intuitive.

If we look at the transcript of one of our users who was interviewed by Graham McAllister, founder of Player Research in 2010

<http://blogs.sussex.ac.uk/elearningteam/2012/09/12/moodle-usability-interviews-from-2010-1/>

What did the user expect to see?



The interviewer said to the staff member “How would you go about changing it to 10 sections?” – very neutral language.

She immediately said “You need something to ADD onto here”

So her first expectation is the keyword ADD

Her next expectation is that you instigate a change at the point where you want it to happen.

So she goes to the BOTTOM of the 5 existing sections.

And then to the Site menu, which is a representation of the site.

When she’s asked “What would you like to see?” she goes immediately to the site menu.

Combining her responses with responses of other users allowed us to get a good sense of what the common expectations are.

So let’s look at how used we used this information to help re-design the “Add a new section” task.

Evaluation

Number of clicks to carry out common tasks

For example, file upload now require 5 clicks
(reduced from 9)

Very difficult to identify causal links between developments Carol has outlined and the user experience of staff and students, so we are essentially looking a proxy measures.

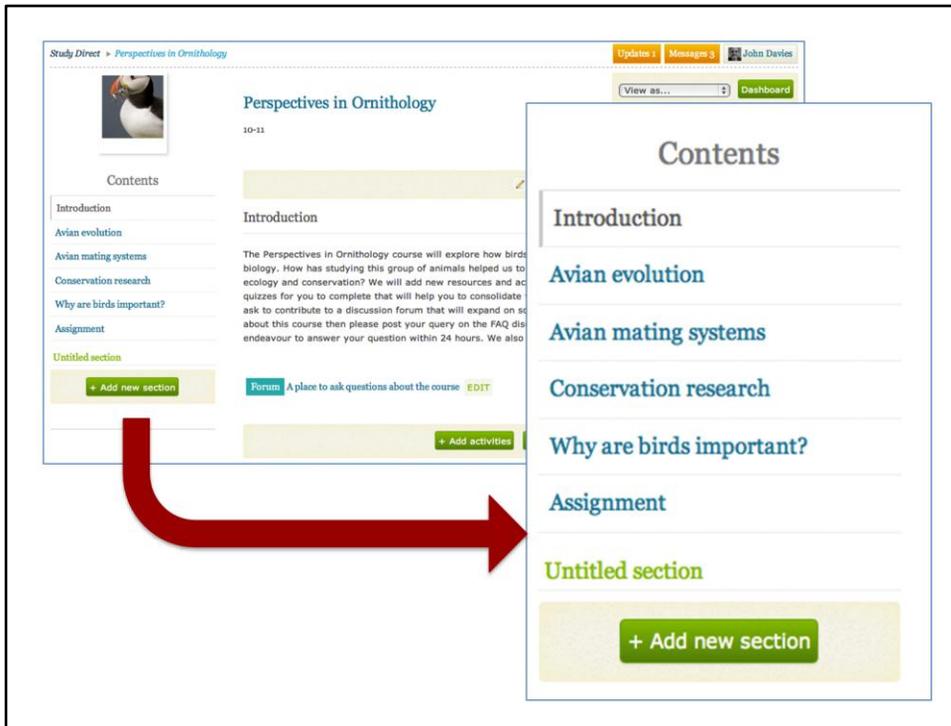
There are some simple empirical measures we can make to evaluate the developments

For example, Carol mentioned that the number of clicks required to upload a file in the standard version on Moodle 1.9 is 9 (or 8 in Moodle 2.3)

We have reduced the number of clicks required to upload a file to 5.

See a demonstration of this at <http://vimeo.com/48739165>

So we have created a better user experience by reducing the number of clicks, or decision points, required for common tasks



This is how our Moodle installation Study Direct looks today.

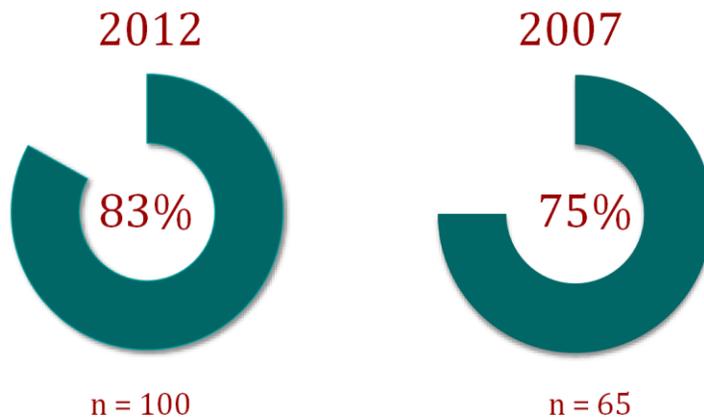
You can see how we've made it more intuitive to add a new section – there is now a big green button that says "+ Add a section" right there in the Contents block.

This meets our users' expectations of how they expect a web site to behave.

Wherever there is a point at which a tutor can take some action to edit the site, the button they need to click is styled in the same way.

Staff opinions of Study Direct

I feel that Study Direct supports my teaching



We can also evaluate staff opinions of Study Direct and look at how these have changed over time.

We undertook a survey of academic staff in May this year – one question asked out the extent to which SyD supported their teaching.

Survey demonstrated that there were high levels of agreement with this statement and this measure had increased from the previous survey we carried out in 2007.

What are your favourite Study Direct features?

'I like it that you can add sections and reorder the material within those sections'

'New file upload system is a big improvement on the previous set up'

'User interface [similar] to other popular....software'

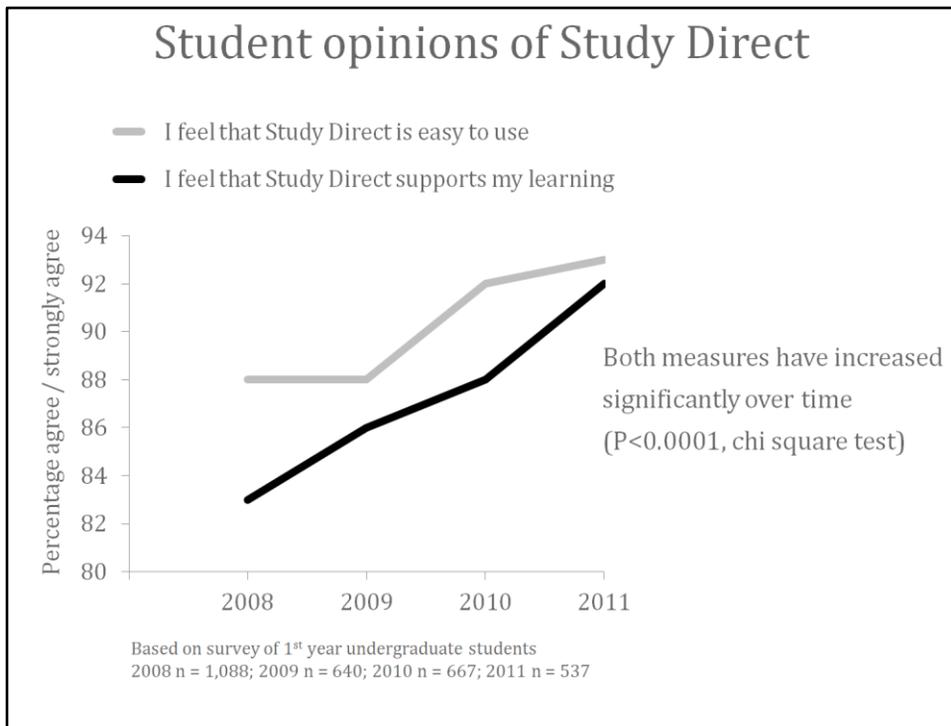
The recent survey also asked staff about their favourite Study Direct features.

A number of respondents mentioned some of the developments that we have highlighted in this presentation.

Respondents also mentioned the interface – gives support to our approach of adopting design patterns from familiar systems where appropriate.

Its fair to say that not everyone likes the changes we have made. People may have spent a long time learning fairly complex procedures and workarounds for particular tasks, so changing these can be disruptive.

However, in the longer term, we feel the costs of this disruption are outweighed by the benefits gained by new users of the system, coupled with appropriate resource for existing users.



What about students? They are, of course, at the centre of this learning experience. As Carol said, if you can improve the user experience you hopefully improved both the teaching and the learner experience.

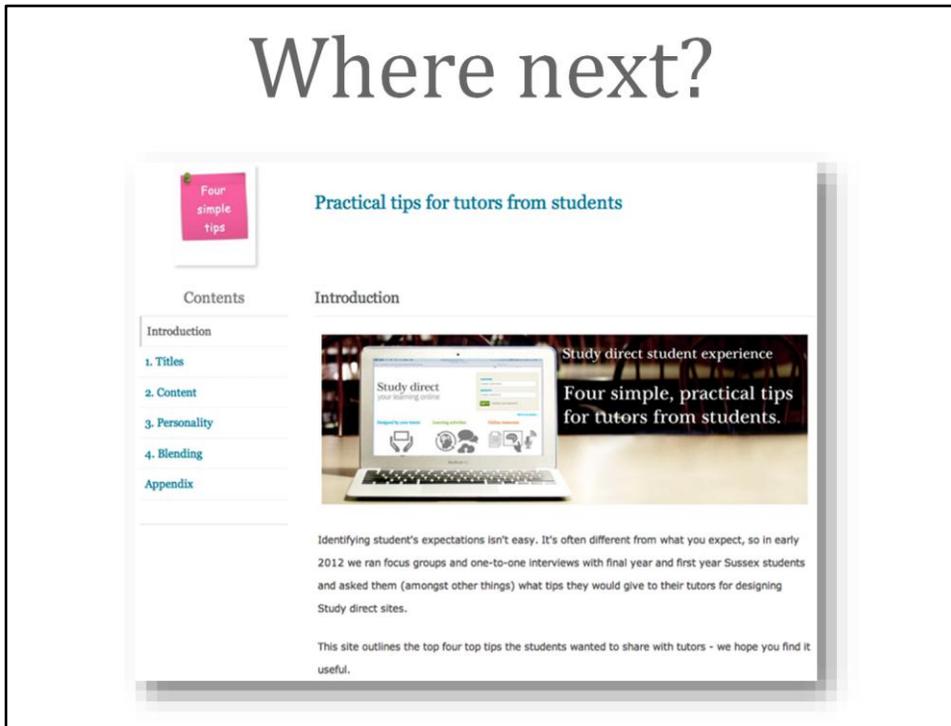
From the student perspective - we can look at is student opinions of Study Direct and how have these changed over time

We have run a survey of 1st year students for the last four years, coordinated by Mark Parsons, and we have asked questions about the ease of use and the extent to which study direct supports their learning

Both of these measures have increased over this period, to a point where satisfaction levels are over 90% and these increased are statistically significant.

So an indication that students are finding study direct easier to use and more supportive to their learning.

Where next?



We are going to continue to put our users and their experiences at the centre of developments

An example of this – we have created some online guidance for staff (within a Study Direct site) on designing sites to support teaching. This guidance was based on interviews conducted with students about what they liked and disliked about the sites they had encountered as part of their studies.

Also, the recent survey has highlighted staff requirements that help to inform our development roadmap. For example, two things that came up consistently from the survey. First, was the desire for better integration between Study Direct and the Library's system for managing reading lists and secondly the creation of a robust system for managing summative online assessment. Now, both of these were on the roadmap, but the feedback from users helps to strengthen the case for prioritising particular developments

blogs.sussex.ac.uk/elearningteam

So that's our brief overview of the approach we have taken to designing an institutional system so it best meets the needs of our users – both staff and students.

We have a blog that details all of the developments that we have undertaken within our version of Moodle and we have also added some stuff to crowdvine – including this presentation and a link to Staurt's talk at Moodle Moot