



## Work Package Report

Evaluation of staff and students' experiences of using Teams sites to support learning and teaching at City, University of London

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 2020 the adaptation of Microsoft Teams Spaces, for learning and teaching, was promoted by City, University of London (City). This evaluation, based on interviews with both staff and students, explores the experience of using this platform and concludes with some recommendations.

Team spaces was viewed positively by both staff and students with many finding the platform user-friendly. However, some staff reported needing more support, particularly around the pedagogic use of Teams spaces; such as student engagement and collaboration. Students, in turn, highlighted the importance of feeling supported and how well some academics had used Teams spaces to do this. Both staff and students expressed frustration at the lack of participation, of some students, in group meetings and chats. On the positive side, the integration with Office 365 tools and the flexibility, offered by the Teams app, were seen as major advantages. Despite this, WhatsApp remained central for most communication among students themselves. There were also mixed responses regarding administrative processes and the use of other tools within Teams Sites. Overall, the report highlights the need for ongoing support and training for both staff and students to fully utilize the potential of Teams Sites as an online space for effective learning and teaching moving forwards.

## PURPOSE

During the pandemic, Teams emerged as an effective tool for creating supportive online communities, particularly among staff<sup>1</sup>. In September 2020, City, University of London recognized the potential of Teams for digital learning and so created Teams sites for every active SITS module to support students' group work, collaboration, and communication. These sites were intended to complement Moodle and staff and students were automatically enrolled. Yet the sites were not visible to students until activated by an academic team owner. Gathering data on the activation and consequent use of Teams for teaching and learning was limited, but the overall usage of Teams for students' learning appears to be underutilized. Through this small-scale evaluation, from September 2020 to September 2022, we hope to gain a better understanding of Teams' usage. The outputs will hopefully be used to inform support and training by LEaD Digital Education for use of Teams sites for teaching and learning.

## APPROACH

From May 2022 – July 2022, LEaD submitted an Ethics application for this work; ethics approval was subsequently granted by the LEaD research ethics committee. Following approval in July 2022, Programme Module Leaders from all schools were invited to participate in an hour interview, specifically on the proviso that they had activated their Teams Sites. 10 module leaders got in touch. Two had to be discounted as they hadn't activated their Teams Sites. We were able to finalise eight

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<sup>1</sup> [Teams community](#) site has over 800 users, [Learning and Teaching community](#) site has 407 users. Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> January 2023

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staff in total. We also included 2 staff who taught extracurricular modules using a Teams site. Although the module wasn't linked specifically to a Moodle module, their experience on Teams Sites was relevant and we made the decision to include their experiences as case studies. We do recognise that these case studies won't be included in any further external dissemination work.

In addition to understanding staff experiences, we also wanted to find out how students interacted with Teams Sites. Via the module leader, the research team contacted students from the relevant modules that had been actively using Teams Sites.

The staff and student interviews took place between July – September 2022. The interview questions for staff focussed on the use of Teams Sites for teaching and learning. The focus group questions for the students considered their challenges in using Teams Site for their learning and development.

This report highlights the key findings from the staff interviews and the student focus groups with reference to the ease of use, types of learning and teaching activities conducted, associated tools used, and future work in relation to blended teaching.

In summary, we spoke with 8 staff from across different schools including Law, Health, Business, Engineering and LEaD's MA in Academic Practice.

1 (UG) – Bayes, 3- SMSCE (3 UG), 1 - School of Health Sciences 2 – City Law School (1 UG and 1 PG), 1 SASS (UG).

12 students agreed to partake in the focus groups. We provided several timed slots and students were asked to choose their availability. Most of the focus group slots had students from the same discipline together. There were a couple of exceptions where some had to take a slot that wasn't part of their grouping.

Students interviewed: City Law school (3 UG and 4 PG), SMCSE (2 UG and 1 PG), and School of Health Sciences PG), who were also doing the Masters in Academic Practice.

School	Staff	UG Student	PG Students
Bayes	1		
SMCSE	3	2	1
SASS	1		
Law	2	3	4
Health			2
Multidisciplinary	1		

## ANALYSIS

Common themes emerged within the participants' responses. The order of themes does not reflect their level of importance. These are listed below in summary and key highlights have been included in this section.

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE INTERVIEW RESPONSES – STAFF

- Many of the staff found Teams Sites to be user-friendly, intuitive with a simple interface that integrates with the Office 365 tools.
- The additional benefit of a Teams app was deemed by staff to be particularly useful for students who worked on their phones. Students also noted that the app allowed them to access their learning from any location.
- Staff found it easier to set students into smaller groups and particularly liked the breakout room function in Teams meeting
- A few lecturers saw teaching on Teams as an opportunity to redesign their learning activities. Teaching strategies incorporated flipped learning and synchronous teaching. Just In Time support and group-led activities were also used to help students engage online.
- Using Teams Site for active learning was deemed, by both staff and students, to be a good thing. However, staff did not know where to turn to for support, especially around engagement and collaborative strategies to support students.
- The significance of lecturers being able to confidently support and facilitate group activities meant that students felt more engaged.
- A few lecturers used several types of collaborative activities such as peer review, break-out rooms, online quizzes, chat functions, and group presentations.
- A small sample of the lecturers noted that they found Teams easy to use. However, staff found it difficult to support and encourage students to make use of integrated tools within Teams
- The main takeaway for increasing student participation and collaboration was to build interactive sessions and conduct group assessments. It would be helpful to encourage the interactive aspects of Office 365 tools within Teams Sites.
- There were several positive replies when asked about the use of other tools within Teams. This response included current and future use of additional tools that integrate with Teams sites. Tools such as Flipgrid, Streaming Videos, Visio, Group chat, Shared documents, OneDrive, Polling, Presentation and Office 365 tools.
- There was a mixed response in terms of administrative processes. The administration of large groups of students was challenging and was commented on by several lecturers. Yet, some advantages included efficiency and being able to expand student numbers globally as well as facilitating external and internal specialists.
- Lack of communication among student groups on Teams was a challenge for some lecturers, who believed that this was due in part to students' use of WhatsApp outside of the course.
- There was some frustration from lecturers about their students not being able to grasp basic digital literacy skills for example clarity over participation in the online space and communication and collaboration with each other.

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES – STUDENTS

- Students suggested that the integration between Teams and Moodle, could be further improved to support group work.
- There was a mixed response from students around an understanding among staff about how to fully utilize the potential of Teams spaces. For example; staff not fully exploiting the collaborative potential of working on a common resource in Teams space. This suggests a need for training to help staff better understand and use the platform's features and functionality.

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- Some students expressed disappointment at the lack of engagement and ineffective use of Teams by some lecturers. On the other hand, some students felt that their lecturers used Teams Site with confidence and managed the discussion flow appropriately which in turn, gave them more confidence in using the tools.
- The lack of participation and engagement, mentioned often by academics, was something that students themselves also found difficult to deal with.
- In the main, WhatsApp was heavily used for communication although one likely reason students continue to use WhatsApp may be that they are not aware that they can set up private study groups in Teams that are not visible to others, including lecturers.
- With respect to flexibility, students, overall, were positive about Teams being utilized in a non-hierarchical way and enjoyed coming together in groups to learn.
- A few Office 365 tools were mentioned, such as sharing documents using One Drive and SharePoint and the calendar app.
- The issue of technical problems was mentioned repeatedly by students. Students complained of the internet crashing and of time lags. Issues also seemed to occur more often if other tools were being used.
- Some students commented that Teams Sites were utilised well by some tutors to give them a more personalised learning experience.

## KEY FINDINGS

### INTEGRATION

Overall, in this evaluation, Teams Sites was deemed to be a useful learning and teaching platform by all the staff members interviewed. Three lecturers noted that the integration of Teams to Office 365 made it easier to use. Furthermore, there were comments that ranged from Teams Site being reliable as well as being a user-friendly platform to work with:

*'...we have a range of modules. Across all these, we use teams to be consistent. We selected teams right from the beginning.'*

One lecturer stated that the additional benefits of an app meant that students found it easy to access Teams on their phones.

*'The trigger for me was when I knew it had an app because obviously Moodle technically has an app, but It's not like this. It does not have millions of dollars poured into development and improvements and that sort of thing, unlike the Microsoft stuff. So, we can streamline what we do on our end, but the students find that they can be doing everything on their phones if they want to because they already are.'*

Another key point about Teams was its capacity to organise students into groups, one way was through the creation of a virtual meeting room invitation which, when sent out to students, made it easy for them to access the space provided:

*'These are in a sense, conference rooms that are open with a URL. This was a complete godsend because that is how we organised the groups and we continue to do that. In 2021,*

*even though breakout rooms are available simply because it is a much more stable technology, and all the student needs is a URL to get to that space.'*

However, through this evaluation it became clear that many sessions were standalone Teams meetings that were not held within the allocated Class Teams space itself. Therefore, opportunities for students to interact in the Teams space were limited. Training for staff, around ways of setting up meetings within the Teams space itself, in a specific channel for example, would support a more consistent approach to the use of the Teams space:

*'...if those recordings, for example, went to the Team site and they could access them from there or we could all access them from there too, then that would get them using the site more. However, I believe that links between different files and recordings can be easily created so this might point to a training need within the context of integration.'*

The question of integration came up in the students' interviews as well. Four students made comparisons between the two main platforms, Moodle and Teams, and suggested improvements:

*'More integration between teams and Moodle'.*

They commented about the capability of Teams compared to Moodle, such as the Teams' recording function as well as its adaptability to support active learning, particularly with group work:

*'The class was divided into five groups and each of them was doing a different build. So that is something that we could not have done on Moodle'*

Other students' comments were about Teams' overall flexibility as well as its integration with 0365 tools:

*'The fact that you can record things that you can, put in links on the chat, you can put in links to wherever you want to, and which may have got missed on something else. I just found it quite good'*

## LEARNING DESIGN

An important finding, that lecturers talked about, was that teaching on Teams was an opportunity to redesign learning activities. The following quotes help elaborate on this:

*'Recreate your teaching plans... I do think it comes down to having to change your style if you are using Teams online or if you are using Teams as a tool, you must use it in a way that they want to interact with it because otherwise they cannot be bothered.'*

This lecturer goes on to suggest that it is the learning design that is key:

*'It is in the learning design that we have or have not done. I mean what has worked very well is in the welcome week, they are given an interesting novel activity to do at the beginning of the day, and they must do one PowerPoint slide with their conclusions at the end of the day, and that worked. For those who have participated, that has worked very well in some cases, exceptionally well.'*

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Lectures and tutorials as standard learning and teaching activities did still take place on some programs and were noted as working well in Teams. One lecturer indicated that recording the session and providing students a space to share their screens ran well on Teams Sites. On the other hand, one Maths lecturer noted that the way they conducted face-to-face sessions did not translate well at all in Teams:

*'I do teach much more discussion way of teaching. When they ask me a question, I just throw it back at them. I find that a bit harder to do on Teams. I also like to use a whiteboard quite a lot. Yes, I worked out how to do that, but I must use my iPad because I've got a pen for my iPad. That means that I can scribble on the whiteboard, and they can see it, and I don't think it worked so much for them. Sometimes I would send them off to whiteboards in the classroom, but that didn't work at all on Teams. That was a disaster when you tried to get them to put stuff on because the way it works, you can only see it if you press "Enter" and then some didn't do that and then, so things weren't appearing and that was total chaos.'*

An effective approach was mentioned by two lecturers who talked about flipping the learning. These involved students completing preparatory work prior to attending the class. The class was then used as an interactive session where students could demonstrate their practical skills:

*'They send them out in preparation for what they are expected to do before they come to class. Then the whole point is that you should be in a situation than spend two hours giving them an opportunity to practice those skills.'*

One extracurricular programme arranged to operate their Teams site in a 'Just in Time' way with great success. This meant that they supported the students better:

*'We sort of drip feed them information throughout the year based on what they need to know when they need to know it. Just in time.'*

Another lecturer, in the Law school, taught synchronously and worked hard to consider the teaching from a student perspective. They used the Teams site and its channels, to get students groups to work on issues and then share their work with their whole peer group:

*'There were no breakout rooms officially at the time of use. They mentioned that the challenges were about having to learn to use channels and making sure that you could get students into groups and then bring them back without losing them on the Internet.'*

In summary, one of the main recommendations in this section would be to help support programme teams, where possible to review their curriculum content and design, to meet the needs of flexible online learning and teaching on Teams and other online platforms.

### SPECIALIST TRAINING AND SUPPORT IN LEARNING DESIGN ON TEAMS SITES

Overall, most of the lecturers in this evaluation, noted that Teams Site was user-friendly but said that the learning experience would be better if other tools were also used in a more dynamic way. However, lecturers didn't seem to know whom to turn to for further guidance. This was needed particularly around engagement and collaborative strategies to support students. Comments ranged from not finding a tool working, to not knowing how to access support:

*'So, we had to do it slightly differently where they either answered, they wrote it on the road, the answer on the piece of paper, and then posted an image. And then talk through the answer. Surely there must be a better way. I know a lot of times as well. I don't know whom to ask.'*

Or even the inclination needed to re-evaluate the programme needs, as it was felt to be just a temporary thing:

*'...my intention is to minimise the use of Teams because I expect most people will be here. Students will be here.'*

The future of exams for students overseas using Teams has been suggested as something that should be given priority and the following comment is an example of the challenges around digital assessment however this comment could be better explained in relation to Teams as a whole.

*'How we assess students who are overseas and give them the experience and for us the assurance that they are taking the assessment exam, written exam, for example, with the same degree of rigor as 200 students sitting in Great Hall one meter apart in front of a small desk and doing exams.'*

There was some frustration that lecturers didn't get any time or support on Teams and learn about the various apps that are available there:

*'Although I recognise some of them and I do use some of them, I don't know what a lot of them are. Maybe it would be quite nice to have a help page, or maybe there is one. I just don't know about it. Which tells you what all of the apps are, what they do, what they might be useful for, and whom to ask for help about them. Whereas I just click on them and look on it Google and Google will find out what it is.'*

These comments clearly indicate that there is a need to provide just-in-time learning and teaching support on Teams sites, as lecturers are not sure what is available:

*'..not sure about how to access the support that I need, or even know it's available. I do a lot of looking on YouTube for answers to my questions. I do a lot of LinkedIn learning. I'd like to think I was part of a community and rather than this is just all on you to figure it out if this is what you want to use. I'm not sure that we have IT support. So just more around the collaborative stuff. So, getting students engaged in.'*

However, one lecturer did mention that they were aware of the specialist community hubs created on Teams, such as the [LEaD Teaching and learning community](#), where a mixture of experts and academic peers come together to answer questions about the effective use of Teams and related apps. However, there was a suggestion to make more specialist trainers available to staff:

*'I would like to see somebody appointed as a SharePoint Office 365 Teams developer who could really help innovators get through it, because Microsoft stuff isn't that easy generally to get onto the ladder of or get to the step beyond trivial use. I think a lot of course Office work could be dramatically improved if we were to use Teams more actively and hit a lot of admin work in the university between faculty and professional staff could be dramatically improved, if we focused on Teams as our platform for ongoing collaboration.'*



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This lecturer felt that what support was available tended to be more around the functionality of Teams rather than the pedagogy of using Teams Sites:

*'I found that I could, for example, add extra tabs and I could connect. I could have a link to the Moodle section in there so that students could go straight there. I would quite happily set all that stuff up, but they didn't use it. I don't know why they didn't use it. I don't know whether it was because it was just easier for them to go in straight into Moodle or to, for example, if we were doing something on OneNote, I just don't know whether it was easier for them to go straight in rather than do it through Teams or maybe they just didn't know. I found Teams to be quite a big platform, and then there's lots of stuff to do within.'*

*'I would love someone to come along with a manual of tricks and tips...particularly in classroom Interactive work. The basics are the basics. You got videos up, you got your notes up, you got your shared documents, you got your class materials and the breakout rooms well, what else do you need? The only exciting thing would be collaborative things, whether poll everywhere or whatever else one can do. It's about using it as more dynamically as a collaborative tool than we do now. The activities bring people together. Training in that a short course in that. A nice, recorded video. with a link.'*

Some students' comments indicate that there may be a lack of understanding among some of the teaching staff about how to fully utilize the potential of Teams spaces. This suggests a need for training to help staff better understand and use the platform's features and functionality.

*'I think tutors didn't utilize quite as much the option to discuss the particular file and then the ability to amend it and edit it together with other students.'*

*'(The Lecturer) used a camera to write his notes on, and the problem with that is every five minutes or so, it would not be focusing. So, someone had to tell him there's a problem going on with your screen and we couldn't really see the work as much'*

There was also some disappointment around the lack of engagement:

*'When the lecturer is just not as engaged. You just don't feel like you want to use it and you think you can miss it ...I'm not going to do anything anyway.'*

On the other hand, one student reported positive experiences with their online learning and highlighted the importance of certain factors for an effective learning experience."

*'What works well is when the module leader is very experienced in using the teams and is very organized'*

Another student commented on how the management of learning sessions, by a specific lecturer was very good:

*'Maybe this is just dependent on the module leader, but I had xxxx and... his PowerPoints were always really good and there were no issues with it and he would mute everyone. And*

*then you could ask the question in the chat. And he'd always answer it. And they worked well'*

Lecturers setting up student groups and facilitating group activities in allocated Teams channels were also deemed successful:

*"She would divide us into groups and put this in one group and discuss the question for the tutorial and then she would kind of visit each channel or each group to actually see that we're all contributing to the question...."*

The student also mentioned how the online space was used to support the production of student-created content and peer learning.

*'Then she divided us into each group again, probably 10 groups, and then we could upload the files there. So then other people from other groups could see our presentation'*

Some students emphasized the importance of feeling supported in a personalized way and said that lecturers used Teams spaces effectively to provide this support.

*"I was struggling to understand something, she was like just try and call me on Teams. So just literally press the call button and if I'm available I will answer you"*

*'What worked really well for us was being able to have one-on-one meetings or small meetings with the teachers'*

One student felt that her confidence grew in the smaller tutorial groups online. The comment below is about her experience in Teams online tutorials compared to face to face:

*'In person, they (the lecturer) would just say in general does anyone get it? The whole room will be silent, and they still have to carry on regardless, whereas we have more like a one-to-one kind of thing, and I feel like it creates confidence as well when I asked my questions because I'm not like shy.'*

## STUDENT GROUPS AND COLLABORATION

Some lecturers noted that it was easier to set up small group activities using the 'break out rooms' function in Teams, and one lecturer reported that the experience felt more personal for students.

*'Students didn't get lost in the numbers and were able to conduct the activity set out for them in their small groups.'*

Lecturers recognized that small groups of students could help prevent feelings of exclusion, and support engagement, as demonstrated by this comment

*'Students couldn't be lost amongst a sea of faces. We were able to convince them that they needed to engage so much harder to hide. Even on Teams, it's hard to hide if there's only seven of you in the room'.*

While some lecturers reported positive experiences with creating group activities, there was also some disappointment that not all students participated actively, even though those who did engage, engaged well:

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*'...Their outputs were often very good. That was due to a handful of people in each group tackling them. I still think all this is worth it because at least it gets a core of the students who are fully functioning.'*

The lack of participation and engagement, mentioned often by academics, was something that students themselves found very difficult to deal with:

*'Just student engagement.... when you're in a breakout room and you go hi and no one answers back ... you just end up doing all the work on your own'*

Some answers reflected a sense of isolation and frustration.

*'Lots of ...cameras off and people not participating as much. It was very cold in the beginning. We had teachers asking questions and nobody answering and then being like can somebody answer please'*

This included a sense that including that other student were just not putting in the work:

*'There's only two people who participate and the rest just sit back and listen. Or probably don't even listen at all. They're just there for attendance.'*

Some comments included requests for the university to make engagement mandatory '

*To make sure everyone was involved, like if every student said something I think I would like it more'*

Lecturers used different collaborative activities in Teams Sites, including peer review, break-out rooms, online quizzes, chat functions, and group presentations. One lecturer suggested creating team channels and clearly communicating expectations for students to meet individually and summarize their meetings in the chat box. Another suggestion was to inform students that program team members would randomly drop in to see how meetings are going. Lack of communication among student groups on Teams was a challenge for some lecturers, who believed that this was due in part to students' use of WhatsApp outside of the course. There was also a comment about students lacking confidence and skills in using City's collaboration tools, which may have contributed to their reluctance to post on Teams.

*'A lot of students were going from the Teams into WhatsApp chats. They were not even using the Teams site as a group place. WhatsApp suddenly seemed to take over, which was a bit annoying or frustrating. But then you must be happy that they're just engaging on some forums.'*

This is echoed by students' comments about the underuse of Teams spaces set up for them:

*'..there were also rooms created for different classes. Those were very, very underused. We really just used the e-mail to get in touch with teachers and then use WhatsApp between ourselves. I think I mostly used it (Teams) for my lectures. So, the features within the lectures, sort of the chat, the recording function.... So, there were two channels created for us for different classes and to talk with our classmates outside of class.'*

Some lecturers were disappointed that students didn't engage with them in Teams:

*'They have a WhatsApp group, so they are generally quite reticent to engage with lecturers and they prefer to keep it outside of the spaces. My feelings around communication are I don't want them to post anything inappropriate, but I think the biggest problem will be getting them to post anything.'*

Lecturers generally thought that WhatsApp groups were not key to supporting students' development of important digital literacy skills in an inclusive and consistent way. Yet, there were examples of students who thought using Teams for peer learning was more professional. One student also mentioned how aware she was of her own digital safeguarding.

*'Meeting up with my peers, I say that Teams is more professional because you maybe don't want to give your number to some people. So, like for example I did use it more than WhatsApp in terms of doing group work'*

Jisc ([2022](#)) states that digital participation should always be safe and respectful, and not exclude other people. The lack of a consistent approach here can be seen as one student mentioned feeling isolated because they were not aware of the WhatsApp groups that were around her:

*'If you're not also in a WhatsApp group, because I joined one quite late not realizing they existed, I think it can be quite isolating in that sense because you don't actually realise all of these other things are going on around you.'*

In the main most of the students interviewed tended to see WhatsApp as the obvious place to set up an online student group:

*'WhatsApp, I think that's everyone's go to'...*

One respondent suggested that the reasons for this were not always the best ones: '

*I genuinely think that everyone uses WhatsApp (instead of) from like Teams because it's more private. They could talk whatever they are. I think just for our year, a lot of people have conducted colluding just in WhatsApp and they think they're not going to get caught with it'*

Yet one possible reason why students continue to heavily use WhatsApp may simply be that they are not aware that they can set up private study groups in Teams that are not visible to others, including lecturers. '

*If we were able to, like, make our own teams like a private team for ourselves.... secure option where I share my folder with my group, and we only have access to that. So, you're looking at a secure space to work with your study group without others being able to come in and look at what you're doing'*

Though one student mentioned that her group used the Team space to meet up and saw it as an obvious place to continue a conversation:

*'...we arranged our own groups in the lunch break out time... We would create other teams meeting because we found that had been easier to use'*

## FLEXIBILITY

Teams Sites was seen as successful because of its flexibility and the availability of a Teams app, which allowed students to access learning from any location. The ability to access the learning materials and activities from anywhere was viewed as a success by many, as indicated by the comments below.

*'To be located abroad or you can be an in-person located in London. We mix you up. It's a powerful corporate collaboration tool that can be used for teaching and you know what's not to like.'*

*'Some students were plugged in online. We had one student who was in Dubai, one was in Africa. Some students were here.'*

*'The adaptability (of students) to this (teams) even from initial use is very quick. By the 2nd week, there are no questions anymore.'*

Another lecturer noted the capacity of Teams as an efficient hub to *'streamline their processes and sharing documents'*. This was in contrast to a few comments that suggested that *'the admin process for a large cohort had been difficult'* whilst another lecturer noted that *'they had to expand the admin process themselves e.g., creating more channels for student groupings'*.

Other benefits of using Teams Sites included courses becoming *'more international* and *'increasing numbers of students to being [open and receptive] to the teaching dynamics within this sort of teaching environment.'*

As well as supporting flexibility in terms of the teaching arrangements:

*'You can put more lecturers much more effectively in the same class, space. So, for instance, if you got a new member of lecturers joining and meant to be shadowing, and they sort of the second host. If you prep a little bit, you can plant questions and get dialogues going, so the lecturers can talk to each other and the (students) like that. It's much easier I think than putting the lecturers directly in the classroom.'*

*'In Teams, we were assigned one channel. Then I created different students into one group and then in one channel.'*

Despite many comments about students not engaging on Teams with their peers. There was still some positive feedback from students themselves about how they enjoyed coming together in groups to learn. This included the way Teams spaces was utilized to support peer activities in a non-hierarchical way:

*'It's easier to work more collaboratively and especially in online and development through the channels. We're doing a module now where we're in our groups, but we can go back and meet in those channels and then we can see everything we've shared previously with each other. then we can store our own PowerPoints there. It's not like there is someone who holds a master copy. It's a lot easier to share screens on teams because it pops up with kind of more options*

Furthermore, Teams' flexibility meant that it could be set up with channels serving different purposes. This was appreciated as it meant it was a space that served a dual function; sharing but also getting support when needed:

*'Engineering Hackathon example: This was like a marathon we did for engineering. We had a general channel where they would put everything, we had links to where we had to upload our stuff. They posted the recordings we would have or the schedule. Then the other channels they had was the helpline.'*

## TOOLS USED BY TEACHING PRACTITIONERS AND STUDENTS

There were several positive replies when asked about the use of other tools within Teams. This response included current and future use of additional tools that integrate with Teams sites. Tools such as Flipgrid, Streaming Videos, Visio, Group chat, Shared documents, OneDrive, Polling, Presentation and Office 365 tools.

In comparison, Zoom was used at the time when Teams didn't have the facilities for break-out rooms, however, 3 lecturers noted some challenges using Zoom. They believed Zoom was useful for conferences and not necessarily student group activities.

*'We took the decision to do teams, not the perennially popular zoom, and that was to do with collaboration versus conferencing.'*

One lecturer felt that Zoom didn't work as well as Teams did in its settings for group activities

*'When I've tried to use these features on Zoom, they don't always work. You must change some settings to make them work with teams because everything else is all part of the same company. It just all works well. It flows well. try to do it once you zoom in, it was a disaster.'*

Three lecturers noted that they found Teams easier and better to use.

The main takeaway for increasing student participation and collaboration was to build interactive sessions and conduct group assessments. It would be helpful to encourage the interactive aspects of Office 365 tools within Teams Sites.

*...' you're using Teams online or if you're using Teams as a tool, you must use it in a way that they want to interact with it because otherwise they can't be bothered. ..Using phones or making quizzes or being able to show them or get them to go and have a look at something on YouTube, something like being able to make them more engaged, I think worked a lot better.'*

Interestingly, four lecturers noted difficulties in supporting students to make use of integrated tools within Teams. Two lecturers noted having difficulties in encouraging students. Comments ranged from students not meeting expectations *'Expected OneNote use but didn't happen.'* or *'What I can't persuade students to do is to be proactive in using Office 365 for collaborative work. That is my great dream'*. Some found themselves lacking digital solutions as the comment here indicates.

*'If there was a way to allow the students to access this whiteboard the same way I had access to it. I know they could use the whiteboard, but they didn't have the pads.'*

With respect to tools used by lecturers, there were a few challenges that arose.

1. *'Exporting chat is supposedly quite high for lecturers' requirements from universities but hasn't been resolved yet.'* This was mentioned by one lecturer as they did have many

## Work Package Report

activities that students were giving feedback on. Others didn't mention it but are also using the chat facility to provide students the opportunity to work together so they perhaps didn't see this as an issue.

2. Along with that students' audio and video recordings now go into their Teams channels/rooms. The way the recordings work is recordings if made in the channel will stay in the channel. This is effective for students as they don't have to search under their own feeds. One lecturer found this new way of recordings to be *'really useful and really quite helpful because it went straight to their stream, and they could have a look at it and make life easy.'*
3. One lecturer noted that whilst she had full use of the online noticeboard, her students didn't as they didn't have the iPad.

*'If there was a way to allow the students to access this whiteboard the same way I had access to it., I know they could use the whiteboard, but they didn't have the pad'.*

The integration with other Office 365 tools such as PowerPoint and Word, were mentioned. The use of emojis in the chat was also mentioned for their use by some lecturers to informally assess understanding during live sessions:

*'Reactions are very helpful also on teams, because teachers would tell us I could see you were confused when facing a class but now I don't know if you're following. So, we would have to send some reactions whether everything was good or not'.*

The sharing function in the Teams meeting was also seen as very useful to support an explanation of complex processes:

*'I do engineering so I think that's like mainly helpful since we have to share screens, so therefore it's easier to see their calculations'*

Two students also mentioned how useful the calendar was in their Teams space, but one had suggestions on how to improve this functionality:

*'More of a calendar integration. For example, I know we can do like the scheduling assistant. If we could expand that to the month and then be able to scroll through, that would make my life easier. Like how it is in Outlook.'*

One student preferred to collaborate with others away from Teams, such as in OneDrive:

*'We find that it's easier to share a file on OneDrive and work live. And I can see the changes she makes and then see mine than sharing on the screen on real time and trying to make the changes both at the same time'*

To the question *'How do Teams sites compare to other tools that you use personally to manage your learning?'* 3 students mentioned Zoom. They felt that Teams was the better option for its collaborative capabilities, whereas Zoom was seen as being unidirectional:

*'You're having a regular meeting and one person is presenting, Zoom is fine. But if you want more of a collaborative space or you're going to come back to stuff... or work on it together. Definitely, Teams is the better option'*

Others thought that Zoom possibly had more access issues and was a much more complex technology to use:

*"I have seen my sister use Zoom at another university and it's not that good. A lot of problems with how you get in the passwords and everything we don't have to do that on team, so that's a relief."*

Mostly, students like the retrieval aspect within Teams. If recordings, resources, or links were shared in the chat they would be there after the session. It also allowed for post session conversations to continue in the chat. Allowing for follow up questions and clarifications:

*'Zoom, more difficult to find their recordings. You didn't have them all saved in a space. Not like Teams .... After the class, you could send any questions or any thoughts that we had and it's more organized, you have your other tabs where you can have the post that you have done or the files that you had shared'*

## TECHNICAL ISSUES

There was a range of difficulties for the lecturers in using Teams Sites. The administration of large groups of students was challenging and was noted by several lecturers.

One law lecturer expressed frustration with the problem of inclusivity and accessibility:

*'...on Teams, you can't have more than 10 groups visible. You can create as many groups as possible, but then when you want students to peer review each other, it's only designed for 10 groups, which is very arbitrary. It makes it difficult for other groups to see each other's work to be totally inclusive and transparent and accessible. I found Teams was really annoying like that.'*

In addition, there was a range of issues around internet lagging and bandwidth both for lecturers and students with some lecturers asking students to turn cameras off to ensure bandwidth can cope. One visiting lecturer found that they had to use their own devices and earphones as the university didn't support them by providing the right tools.

*'...earphones, and these things...we're not getting through because they will not be provided by to VLS. Then I had to manage things on my own.'*

One lecturer found that the chat function didn't lend itself well to the pedagogical activity set for the students.

*'... the key thing they were supposed to be looking at was not always visible. I was trying to get them to write comments to peer review each other the feedback and it's so messy. If you could start a conversation or highlight the presentation, I felt the chat was unhelpful to the pedagogic exercise, like it's this idea of synchronous communication rather than a static point for discussion. I don't think it's very academic. It's designed to be responsive and professional, but that isn't necessary where academic environments are.'*

One instance of meetings running for a long time meant that one lecturer couldn't log in and students left the meeting. However, possibly caused by the creation of a meeting link rather than a meeting in a Teams channel.

*'I hadn't realised that if a meeting runs for longer than 36 hours, a blockage occurs, and you can't log into it anymore. If I can't log out of it, even more worrying. I was trying to log in to this meeting and the reason was that I'd failed to close the meeting from the previous... Whenever I created it. I see. I can't remember if it's 24 or 36 hours. But anyway, it was*



*ultimately my fault, but it was solved by IT within about 20 minutes, but by then the students had left'.*

Data issues arose when one lecturer tried to create a channel for her lecturers and was told that this wasn't permitted.

*'I've got told off recently for using for setting up a channel on Teams to get all the tutors to leave a list of names of people who'd been offered pupillage and I got told, you can't do that because there are data issues.'*

The issue of technical problems was mentioned repeatedly by students. Students complained of the internet crashing and of time lags. Issues also seemed to occur more often if other tools were being used:

*'If we used add-in of teams like the whiteboard or other things, it will go very, very slow. We would have a lot of lags and we would have maybe 30-40 students in a classroom and some of them could watch, some of them had Internet issues'*

Using specialist software was a particularly challenging area that could really affect Teams' screen sharing capability:

*'Then we work a lot with software and software are very heavy on computers and when we do video sharing, can you open your software? Your computer is going to crash. I cannot even share excel or Matlab, which is basic things that we do for pretty much everything. So, it would be challenging in the sense of screen sharing'*

Frustration also with students' own technology; for example, the different functions on a PC being more Teams friendly, compared to a Mac for example:

*'...Give permission when you share your screen, I believe in Microsoft you can give permission to the other person, and you can click around. But for Mac you cannot do that sharing. It is so frustrating when you want to share a document or excel and everything crashes'*

## DIGITAL SKILLS AND EMPLOYABILITY

There was some frustration from lecturers about their students not being able to grasp basic digital literacy. For example, lecturers mentioned students not being able to *'share screens'* or *'check where the chat was'* or *'view the PowerPoint slides'*. It was even more frustrating for lecturers who had assumed that students would have developed these basic digital skills by their first year at university:

*'... Basic stuff that I thought by the second or third year they would be able to do.'*

This comment also relates to the issue for preparing students to use Teams Sites.

*'I don't think Teams is intuitively user-friendly enough. We have a lot of digital poverty or a lot of students who are not necessarily the most sophisticated, not all, we have a very mixed group of huge numbers of students.'*

A key recommendation would be to support students.

*'.. sounds quite basic, but just using those features you can't assume the students are professionally skilled to operate.'*

For example, LEaD could provide slides that lecturers can incorporate into their slide deck to introduce the key features of Teams in the Team meeting. Furthermore, there is some [Educational Technology](#) guidance for students. Furthermore, staff could routinely recommend the Student digital advisers who are available to support students with their digital skills.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

It is evident from the study that Teams Sites has the potential to provide another space for teaching and learning that can, if used well, enable students to work collaboratively and creatively. One of Teams Site's main strengths is its capacity to support active learning, particularly in relation to group work. To harness its potential, there should be a clear strategy around integration and shared good practice with Moodle and other Office 365 tools.

The findings point to the following recommendations that we believe can help LEaD shape Teams Sites to further support staff and students in this work:

### STAFF

1. Redesign the overall learning experience for students when using Teams spaces, including assessments. However, this is part of a bigger picture which is that LEaD work even more closely with teaching teams to support effective learning design.
2. Provide guidance that meetings should be held in Teams channels, rather than in separate meetings. This will support students interacting within the Teams space and accessing resources - which is not always the case with Team meetings.
3. Further develop the community of practice that provides just-in-time guidance and training for lecturers. This community should be user-led and facilitated by LEaD/IT.
4. Team spaces should be introduced into all staff induction programs.
5. It is evident that staff are eager to use Office 365 tools, but they often feel overwhelmed and don't know where to begin. Therefore, provide guidance around which tools would be most relevant to their work.

### STUDENTS

1. Provide guidance to students on how to set up their own private team groups in a safe and inclusive way. This is a key recommendation.
2. Team spaces should be introduced into all student induction programs.
3. Actively promote Student digital advisers to support students' digital skills; for example, with the use of Office 365 tools that are integrated in Teams spaces.

### LESSONS LEARNED

## Work Package Report

Our recruitment process could have been more flexible allowing the Research Team to recruit more widely. We were limited in our reach to get a more varied sample of staff and students. For example, it would have been useful to speak to staff that had chosen not to use Teams Sites to understand their reasons for doing so.

Given the fact that Teams sites were specifically sites linked to Moodle Modules, we learned afterward that extracurricular modules that had been delivered via Teams Sites had proved to be very effective. Due to ethics, we will only be able to use those modules as case studies. We would suggest using a broader recruitment campaign in the future considering modules not wholly connected to Moodle modules.

If our data collection was wider, it would have been useful to collect student data via a survey as we believe we might have reached a wider sample in all schools.

The transcript corrections took a long time- important to put in the ethics right at the start of the need to have third-party support with transcription.

### APPENDICES

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