

# Communicating with your students

With the introduction of Drupal as the host for course materials in Informatics, we want to provide clear guidance about how best to communicate with students in order to ensure they see all important information and to avoid duplication of effort or confusion about where to find what.

The [Informatics OpenCourseWare site](#) built using Drupal does not have a communication system built into it. That means that there is no way to draw someone's attention to something posted on it via Drupal itself. The only sorts of things you might want to put onto Drupal is, for example, an "Errata" page to alert both students and any members of the public to something you realised was erroneous in the lectures slides you've shared.

For any communications you want to have with the enrolled students on the course, you need to do this via the course Learn page. The tools for this have changed a bit with the move from Learn Original to Learn Ultra, so we have outlined what your options are below.

We do recommend checking out our blog post on [Signposting to students](#) for some advice and examples of how best to communicate with students (and ensure they read what you say!)

## Announcements (ILTS recommended tool)

Learn has a useful [Announcements](#) tool which allows you to post messages to students enrolled on your course. Announcements remain on the course site (unless you delete them) and they also appear in [Activity Stream](#) on Learn. When creating an announcement, you can select to send an email to all students with the same message. In a change from Learn Original, any new announcements appear as a pop-up the first time students

log into your course after you have posted it. Students need to manually close the pop-up before they can view the rest of the course Learn page.

We recommend using Announcements (and opting to send them as an email, too) as the most reliable method to ensure that students on the course receive the information.

## **Sending a message to a particular group**

You can send a message to a particular group in Learn Ultra. Instructions here: [Learn Ultra: sending a message to a tutorial group](#).

## **Notifications**

Notifications alert the user to activity on the course site. This may include new content being added or due dates for assignments. The default for notifications is a daily digest sent out after 5pm, however, these can be configured by each user so don't assume a student has received a particular notification.

## **Other tools in Learn Ultra**

You will see these tools, like Announcements, across the top menu bar on your Learn Ultra course page. Unfortunately, there is no way to hide the links from students for the tools which you are not using on your course (although this has been raised with Blackboard as something that would be very useful for them to introduce).

- Discussions: This is Learn's built-in discussion board tool. We strongly recommend using [Piazza](#) instead of this.
- Messages: This is what IS has to say about the Messages tool – The Messages functionality allows instructors to send messages directly to students. However, as announcements are a more streamlined and comprehensive

communication tool, we do not recommend the use of Messages.

TL;DR: We don't recommend using Discussions or Messages. Announcements (with email option ticked) should be used for important things that you want to ensure students don't miss and Piazza for more general chat/answering questions.

## **Where and how do students get notified?**

IS have put together [a helpful table](#) comparing where students will see notifications for the different ways that staff might communicate with them. Some of these tools will be used more/exclusively by teaching staff and others by IT0/admin, but it's worth being aware of all the details.

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### **Get in touch**

[lt-support@inf.ed.ac.uk](mailto:lt-support@inf.ed.ac.uk)

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### **Related links**

[Information Services Good Practice Guidance on Learn Ultra](#)

[Learn Ultra: Sending a message to a \(tutorial\) group](#)