

What's new in Moodle 2.5?

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Moodle 2.5 will be released in May 2013. Since the 2.x series was introduced we have seen lots of incremental improvements but not much in the way of major new features for end users. Moodle 2.5 changes all that and has a number of major feature changes including a couple of real treats.

Open Badges

First up we have Open Badges. In March 2013, the Open Badges Initiative (OBI) standard was formally launched and Moodle 2.5 now has built-in support for Open Badges as part of its core offering.

Many folks may need a bit of background at this point. Put simply, open badges allow learners to represent, verify and communicate their skills, interests and achievements. They do this in a far more meaningful way than a simple certificate and in a more verifiable way than a statement on a CV. Any learning event could have a badge associated with it and issued by the learning provider, be they a school, college, employer, online training provider or face-to-face training provider.

Open Badges can be used in a number of ways:

- to communicate achievements to potential employers
- to motivate and engage online learners as they progress through courses
- to 'level up' within a course or learning path
- to gain acknowledgment and build reputation within online communities.

Importantly, a learner can earn badges from multiple learning providers (badge 'issuers'), pull them into a single collection in an online repository (their 'badge backpack') and share their badges out with various audiences (badge 'displayers' or 'consumers'). Badges may contain information including issuer, issue date, criteria, evidence or artifact, endorsements and expiration.

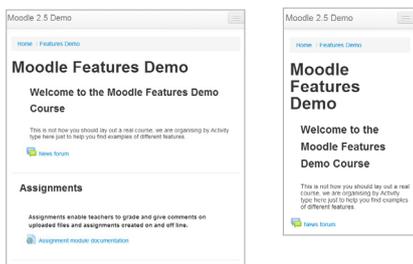
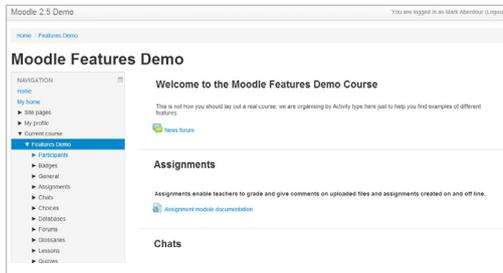
Hopefully that background has stimulated your online learning taste buds! Moodle 2.5 essentially works as a 'badge issuer' whereby badges can be allocated for course completion or for activity completion within courses, such as an end-of-unit assessment. Open Badges for Moodle is not the first implementation of Open Badges in a learning platform, but it's certainly the biggest platform to embrace the standard to date. It follows in the footsteps of smaller players like Purdue Passport and Optima LMS, builds on successful Open Badge implementations in course hosting systems like Blackboard CourseSites, Codery, Makewaves and Cloudworks, and also extends the work of open source plug-in developers including the 'Openbadges' block for Blackboard Learn, the 'Badger' block for Moodle and BadgeOS for Wordpress. Now Moodle has joined the throng, expect the floodgates to open and rest to follow! It's great to have this included in core Moodle and we look forward to lots of interesting implementations.

Bootstrap theme

This one has been a long time coming: Moodle is now truly mobile friendly, out of the box! Over the years various attempts have been made to build Moodle native apps, and this led to a lot of work on building mobile web services into Moodle to communicate with such apps. Support was also built in for device-specific 'themes', and Moodle does already come shipped with the My Mobile theme which can be setup to display on tablet and smartphone devices. But none of these approaches was ideal and the user experience across devices was inconsistent. Enter Bootstrap, which can be used as your site's default theme and is fully responsive and so resizes gracefully for desktop, tablet and smartphone users and thus provides a consistent web-based user experience

across all device types. For the Moodle mobile experience Bootstrap has, quite simply, nailed it!

Out of the box, your Moodle 2.5 with Bootstrap enabled will look like the following. Obviously this hasn't been jazzed up with any images or branding, but you can how the course layout changes smoothly. Any top level navigation is available by clicking on the menu button, and all blocks automatically move underneath the main content so the most important information is available on-screen rather than having to scroll down to find it the content.



Bootstrap has been available as a Moodle plugin for some months already. As with all base Moodle themes, Bootstrap is meant to be built on rather than used 'as is'. At Epic we have been using it as our standard base theme for all new projects for a few months now, so that even our most basic Moodle offering is now multi-device friendly. It's a great addition to Moodle and brings it bang up to date with what users expect of web applications in 2013.

Plugin administration

For a long time WordPress has set the benchmark for automatic plugin installation and update management. Moodle has now caught up and the Notifications page allows you to check whether your site and plugins are up to date, and to install the updates there and then. It's another example of Moodle coming right up to date with best of breed web applications.

Thought needs to be given to testing and release procedures and you might not want to use this feature on a live site without having a mirrored test site first. System administrators of large sites with their own version control and release management processes may shy away from this, but for small and medium sized sites with limited technical expertise available, this will be a really useful feature.

Usability improvements

There are a few other general usability improvements. All large forms are now split into expandable sections, with the 'General' and required sections open but all others closed by default. This makes quite a difference.

In particular it affects Course and Quiz settings pages. Blocks can also now be dragged and dropped on all pages throughout the site, not just in course pages as before.

Course lists update

This change ensures that course listings are now displayed consistently throughout Moodle, for example on the search page, front page and category page. It's a major improvement as consistency of course menu presentation is important, however it is vital to note that themes built for Moodle 2.4 or previous versions will likely be affected by this change, so thorough testing of themes is required during any upgrades. Moodle.org provides [help for developers](#) of sites affected by this upgrade. There are a long list of additional miscellaneous improvements on Moodle.org. A few standout ones include:

- The notifications page now displays performance warnings if the site is in theme designer mode, 'developer' debugging mode or if JavaScript caching is turned off. These are all developer tools but are commonly enabled on live sites and result in poor performance, so this is a welcome feature.
- Essay questions now include an answer template which is great for specialist subject teachers and a huge improvement on the blank editor that students previously had to use.
- Enrolled users page now includes a search function which is very useful for courses with large student populations.
- In course pages, the 'Settings' block has been renamed to 'Administration' and all reports have been moved there as it was widely perceived to be unintuitive for course reports to be in the 'Navigation' block.
- Course overview images and other files can now be added to the course listings. Lots of people did this through custom themes, but it can now be done by course creators, which is a real improvement.

Moodle 2.5 is a real milestone release in the 2.x series from the perspective of new features. It's in beta right now so it's well worth downloading and having a play with, and submitting any bugs you find to the [Moodle Tracker](#) in order to get it all polished for final release in a few weeks time!

Contact us if you want to know more about Moodle 2.5. Also, take a look at some of our other Moodle and learning platform resources on our [Knowledge Base](#).

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