

# How the University of Westminster Empowers Students and Staff with Reliable AI-Driven Support through Blackboard and LearnWise

By leveraging the partnership between Blackboard and LearnWise, University of Westminster provides AI tools and a more streamlined student experience to its students.

The University of Westminster was originally founded in 1838 as the Royal Polytechnic Institution, the first polytechnic in London, with a mission of educating the city's working people. Renamed the University of Westminster in 1992, the Institution now educates students from all over the world across its four London campuses. It offers degrees across a wide range of disciplines, such as architecture, software engineering, journalism, and more. To best support modern learners, the Institution has been using Blackboard® LMS as its virtual learning environment (VLE) for more than 15 years. In addition to being one of the most innovative VLEs on the market, Blackboard LMS also has the ability to bring added value to its customers through strategic integration partnerships with other tech vendors, such as LearnWise AI.

UNIVERSITY OF  
WESTMINSTER

LearnWise

## INSTITUTION TYPE:

4-YEAR-PUBLIC

## LOCATION:

LONDON, ENGLAND

## POPULATION:

21,000+

## SOLUTIONS:

BLACKBOARD® LMS

BLACKBOARD® ILLUMINATE



## The Challenge

### Building a Supportive Student Experience

One of the University of Westminster's main priorities has been to expand its use of impactful AI on campus. "The main institution-wide goal that we were looking to address here is to try to find our pathways into making effective use of generative AI," said Gunter Saunders, director of digital capability development and AI leadership at the University of Westminster. "So that was the main driving force behind looking at the connection between LearnWise AI and Blackboard LMS. We have had a fairly clear policy around generative AI for two years now, and that policy is about engaging with it in safe, equitable and useful ways. Our approach is to educate students to use AI in legitimate ways in all aspects of their learning."

Another key challenge for the University has been changing student expectations around support and its availability, especially with student populations now including more non-traditional learners and learners who are balancing education with work and other responsibilities. "We know that our students want 24/7 support, and we also know that our academic colleagues cannot provide that 24/7 support," Saunders said. "Now, of course, our academic colleagues do the best they can—they have their hours when they speak to students. There just aren't the hours in the day to be able to answer all the questions."

*"Westminster doesn't have a digital learning strategy. It has an education strategy."*



Gunter Saunders, Director of Digital Capability Development and AI Leadership  
University of Westminster





## The Solution

### A Blackboard and LearnWise Partnership

Given these goals, Saunders and his team were excited to discover LearnWise's integration with Blackboard LMS, which has long been University of Westminster's virtual learning environment (VLE). Saunders cited the fact that LearnWise, the AI platform built for higher education that offers 24/7 support and tutoring through flexible AI assistants trained on existing documentation and systems for 24/7 user support and tutoring, has effectively received a seal of approval from Jisc. Jisc, the Joint Information Systems Committee, is a UK-based non-profit organization that provides data and technology solutions for educational institutions and publishes trusted reports on tools and trends across the sector. "Jisc has a strategic partnership with [LearnWise]," said Saunders. "Jisc had previously done a bunch of due diligence around them as a supplier and that just made it that much easier for us to engage with them. The minute we heard about LearnWise, we wanted to try and get involved with them." Blackboard has also previously worked with Jisc by researching ways to introduce AI into EdTech responsibly, doubly strengthening the partnership.

The University engaged LearnWise's solutions for various offices on campus, but crucially for Blackboard LMS, in order to provide the instant and timely support that today's learners expect. "Now, . . . any day of the week, at any time, you can actually get some help from within the specific Blackboard site from an assistant specifically trained on the content of that site," Saunders said. "Blackboard [LMS] is by far the heaviest utilized system we have at the University. That together with something that can handle high volume queries is really how we want to support our students."

Of the connection between Blackboard LMS and LearnWise itself, Saunders added, "It is a nice integration as well. With some integrations, the LTI connection is not great, not as good as this. I think this is a really good one."

Another benefit of the LearnWise integration with Blackboard LMS has been consistency. As the AI assistant is trained on a course's content, it can help students find what they're looking for even if a course might be set up differently from others. With LearnWise AI, students can locate important information—regardless of how the course is designed, use custom-generated study plans and practice exercises to prepare for what's coming up, and more—all without leaving the VLE.

“Blackboard [LMS] as an environment is obviously very consistent, but our academic colleagues will put information in there in different ways,” Saunders said. “So the AI assistant provided by LearnWise is a real solution for that because a student could just ask for what they need in plain language, and the assistant will help find that for them.”

The University has also implemented LearnWise in other areas of campus, such as the Student Centre, so students can ask the AI assistant questions about any number of campus policies or initiatives and get a quick answer. The assistant’s availability has also been valuable for staff at the centre, enabling newer staff members or student workers to field in-person inquiries. “[The staff] don’t know everything about the rules, regulations, whatever it is in the University,” Saunders said. “So they are finding the AI system very helpful.”

*“We know that if we give students a tool to use that is not integrated seamlessly within Blackboard [LMS], they don’t use it. [With LearnWise], they don’t have to leave Blackboard [LMS] to make use of the AI assistant.”*



Gunter Saunders, Director of Digital Capability Development and AI Leadership  
University of Westminster



## Insights Delivered

### Working Toward Improved Course Design

The University of Westminster is still in the early days of its Blackboard LMS and LearnWise integration, but the initial data has been promising. “There are indications that a good portion of students are finding it helpful,” Saunders said. “The fact that a student can go to any Blackboard site structured in any way that an academic colleague has decided to structure it and they can find things very quickly by using the AI [integration], that’s a big thing for us.”

As far as the LearnWise Student Centre implementation, there have been around 34,000 queries submitted to the Centre since the start of the 2025-26 academic year, and Saunders says that nine percent of those were through the AI assistant. Saunders and his team have been auditing the responses given by the AI to student inquiries, which are presented anonymously, and have been thrilled to find

that the answers have been correct across the board. “We know for sure that those nine percent of queries, the answers given were good answers,” he said. “This was a proof of concept, really, for us.”

Another interesting result of working with LearnWise has been that students seem more comfortable asking the AI assistant certain questions than in a classroom, something Saunders referred to as “breaking down barriers.” “If you’re shy or you’ve got another reason why you might not ask a question publicly, the AI assistant is there and it’s private. . .they’re all anonymous.”

Furthermore, as a result of the integration, there has been an emerging interest in utilizing the resulting data to potentially improve course structure to make those courses more effective and engaging for students. Saunders cited the law school in particular, which is starting to intentionally gather this data with an eye towards its own courses.

“They want to begin to look at how the structure of a course, the content of a course, is affecting students’ learning,” he said. “They are finding the [anonymous] records of the chats the students are having within a module very revealing, because it’s telling them which things students are struggling with. It’s also revealing how students approach studying a topic, and they’re finding that really interesting as well. So I think there’s a change that’s coming as a consequence of being able to see how students are interacting with the material.”

Saunders also mentioned the University is interested in leveraging data from Blackboard® Illuminate in connection with the Blackboard LMS and LearnWise integration to further analyze usage data and gain a fuller picture of student interactions with the VLE and the AI assistant, to better determine workload reduction for faculty and staff. “That’s an interesting area for us to expand on going forward,” he said of exploring these specific datasets.

*“We were still worried about things like the AI possibly giving incorrect answers, but we’ve looked at every single question that’s come in since September, and none of them are anything other than pretty good answers.”*



Gunter Saunders, Director of Digital Capability Development and AI Leadership  
University of Westminster



## Epilogue

We'd like to thank Gunter Saunders for speaking with us about the University of Westminster's Blackboard LMS and LearnWise integration. We're looking forward to seeing how they continue to leverage this partnership and its resulting data on behalf of students, faculty, and staff.



Ready to learn more about what Blackboard LMS and its integrations can do for your institution? [Discover more about our award-winning LMS now](#), as well as about [our integration with LearnWise](#).

Product highlighted in this customer case study:  
**Blackboard LMS, Blackboard Illuminate**

[Learn more at \*\*blackboard.com\*\*](https://www.blackboard.com)

**Blackboard** 

©2026 Blackboard LLC and its affiliates. All rights reserved.