Plugins Usage Survey, 2015

Purpose of the survey

Moodle is open source and users use it in many different ways in places all over the world, without any central control. As such, there is no clear picture of which plugins, both those distributed with the standard Moodle distribution and those distributed separately via the Moodle Plugins Directory, are actually used.

This survey is part of our research to help discover what plugins Moodle users use, in order to focus development efforts and to determine how Moodle is used in different educational sectors. Results from this survey will also complement download and update information from the Plugins Directory.

Research questions

The survey and its results analysis were driven by a number of research questions.

- What standard plugins are not used and may be removed, deprecated or fixed?
- What standard plugins are used a lot and may need more attention?
- What additional (third-party, contributed) plugins (if any) should be added to the standard distribution?

Methodology

The survey contained 17 questions, predominantly focussed on capturing usage of different types of plugins on Moodle sites. The survey did not attempt to capture the relative scale of sites or the scale of use of individual plugins within sites, only whether plugins were used or not. The survey also captured some related demographic information such as respondent's educational sector, professional role, location, institution/organisation and length of time using Moodle.

The survey was designed to be easy to fill to maximise responses. A Moodle Feedback activity was used. To access the survey, respondents were required to log in using their moodle.org accounts. Responses were not anonymous, which was felt to ensure reliable, accountable responses, but it may have reduced the response rate.

The survey approach taken was to test the initial design internally within Moodle HQ first, followed by piloting with invited members of the Moodle community. After this, the survey was opened to all. The survey was mentioned on Twitter and later announced in a newsletter, primarily targeting administrators of registered Moodle sites.

Results

The survey was closed on Wednesday 21st October, 2015. No fixed closing date was announced. Responses had peaked during the week prior and had tapered off, so the survey was closed to allow analysis and reporting.

Respondents

At the closing of the survey there were 353 responses. It is difficult to estimate a response rate as the survey was open to the entire Moodle community. Some respondents may have been representing a single institution or organisation, hosting a single or small number of Moodle sites, while others were representing companies hosting many Moodle sites, such as Moodle Partners. All responses were weighted equally.It is worth noting that a separate survey of plugins used by Moodle Partners is being conducted.

Sectors

Respondents were asked to identify the educational sectors their site or sites were used in. It was possible for respondents to nominate multiple sectors, which in some cases indicates the broad range of education at an institution or organisation (such as a K-12 school covering both primary and secondary) while other overlapping responses indicates hosting for multiple institutions or organisations.

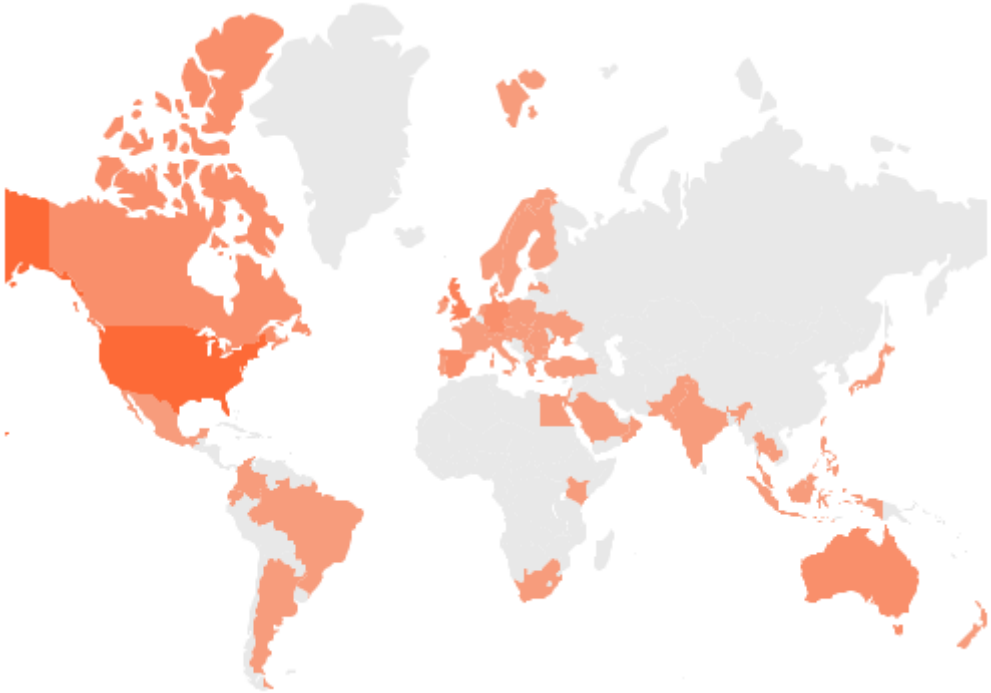
Educational Sectors	
Primary (K-6)	26
Secondary (7-12)	82
College/University	204
Vocational/Technical	61
Workplace (Corporate, Govt.)	59
Healthcare	23
Non-profit	35
Defense/Armed Forces	1
Other	26

To simplify analysis, sectors were grouped. Where a respondent selected more than one sector, it is possible their responses could fall into more than one sector group.

Grouped Educational Sectors	
Schools (Primary, Secondary)	86
Higher-ed (College/University, Vocational/Technical)	238
Workplace (Corporate, Government, Healthcare, Non-profit, Defense)	85
Other	26

Locations

Respondents reported to be from 57 countries around the world. Because the survey was only provided in English and promoted by Moodle HQ in English, this may indicate a bias.



https://infogr.am/plugins_survey_respondents

Argentina	5	Hungary	1	Portugal	3
Aruba	1	India	4	Romania	2
Australia	30	Indonesia	1	Russian Federation	6
Austria	4	Ireland	4	Saudi Arabia	1
Brazil	6	Israel	2	Serbia	2
Bulgaria	1	Italy	4	Singapore	1
Cambodia	1	Japan	7	Slovakia	1
Canada	16	Kenya	1	Slovenia	1
Colombia	3	Latvia	1	South Africa	5
Czech Republic	2	Malaysia	1	Spain	17
Denmark	3	Malta	1	Sweden	7
Ecuador	2	Mexico	4	Switzerland	15
Egypt	1	Netherlands	11	Taiwan	1
Finland	2	New Zealand	5	Thailand	1
France	9	Norway	1	Turkey	1
Germany	21	Oman	1	Ukraine	2
Greece	2	Pakistan	2	United Kingdom	39
Guam	1	Philippines	1	United States	81
Hong Kong	1	Poland	3	Viet Nam	1

Roles

Respondents were asked to nominate their role or roles within their institution/organisation. It was possible for a respondent to select more than one role.

Respondent Roles	
Teacher	173
Instructional Designer	155
Administrator/Systems Engineer	303
Developer	104
Trainer	143
Decision-maker	131
Researcher	43
Student	26
Other	5

The results show that respondents were mostly administrators, some of whom undertook other roles.

Time using Moodle

Respondents were asked how long they had been using Moodle at their institution/organisation. This was both an indication of the maturity of the site and the experience of the respondent.

Length of use	
Considering using Moodle in future	2
Piloting Moodle	7
Less than 1 year	11
1 to 3 years	33
3 to 5 years	73
More than 5 years	227

Results show that most respondents had been using Moodle for a considerable period of time with mature sites.

Plugins reported

Plugins were grouped according to their plugin type. Because it was not certain respondents would be able to distinguish standard plugins from additional plugins (contributed plugins from the Plugins Directory), these were presented together, but additional plugins were identified in lists.

Not all plugin types were surveyed. The choice of which types to include was based on:

- relevance to most users (teachers, students),
- issues reported on the Moodle Tracker, and
- types of popular plugins on the Moodle Plugins Directory.

Additional plugins included in the survey were taken from the top downloaded plugins for the last year on the Plugins Directory.

Respondents were able to list other plugins in a free-text response, which may have included other plugin types and additional plugins not listed.

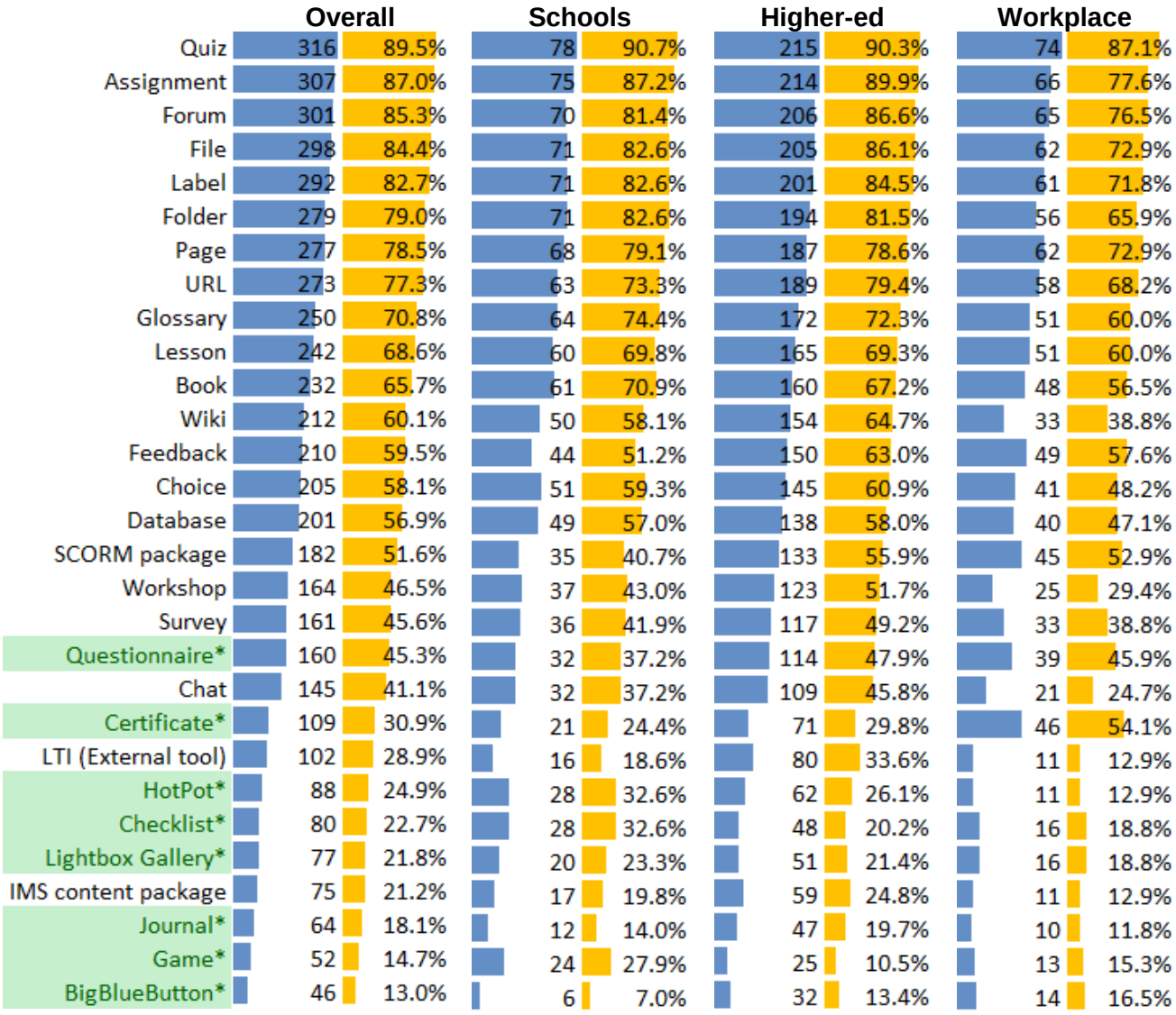
In each of the following sections, additional plugins are noted using an asterisk and are highlighted. Tables are shown with an absolute number of reported uses. Blue bars show relative use in relation to the most widely used plugin within the plugin type. Relative figures are also provided as a percentage compared to the number of overall responses and within each educational sector. Yellow bars graphically represent this percentage.

It's worth noting that responses indicate plugins that respondents say are in use on their site. There may be other plugins that are installed or enabled, and possibly used to a small degree, but responses show what respondents recall and may be biased by their experience and preferences.

Except for 5 responses, all respondents who selected "Other" as a educational sector chose this together with other sectors. For this reason, there is no results for the Other group shown in charts as it would not be relatively equivalent to other groups. It is also not clear why respondents chose other, so drawing conclusions from results for this group would not be meaningful.

Due to the fact that respondents could choose multiple sectors and the Other group is not show, figures shown in results will not sum accurately across groups. However, overall figures and figures within groups are accurate.

Activity modules (including Resources)

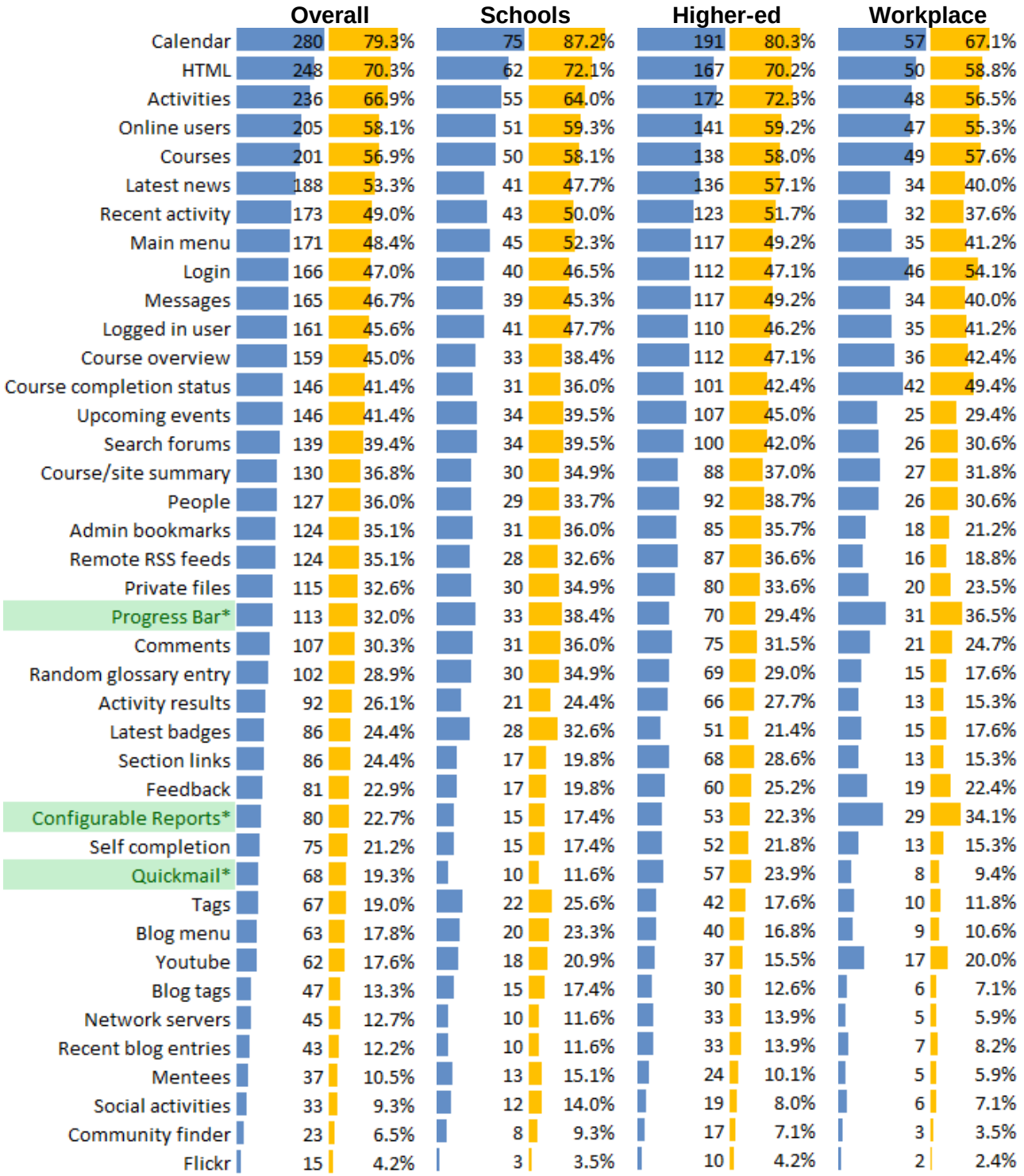


Quiz, Assignment and Forum are the most used activity modules, followed by a list of resources.

Questionnaire is the most widely used contributed activity module or additional plugin of any type. This plugin duplicates the functionality of the standard Feedback module. Reasons for the Questionnaire plugin's popularity may be that Feedback is disabled by default and that Questionnaire includes a number of features missing from Feedback. A project has been underway for some time to combine the features of Survey, Feedback and Questionnaire into a single plugin.

The Certificate module is used relatively more in Workplace sectors. The Hotpot, Checklist and Game activity modules are used more in Schools than other sectors.

Blocks


Overall
Schools
Higher-ed
Workplace
Calendar 280 79.3% 75 87.2% 191 80.3% 57 67.1%
HTML 248 70.3% 62 72.1% 167 70.2% 50 58.8%
Activities 236 66.9% 55 64.0% 172 72.3% 48 56.5%
Online users 205 58.1% 51 59.3% 141 59.2% 47 55.3%
Courses 201 56.9% 50 58.1% 138 58.0% 49 57.6%
Latest news 188 53.3% 41 47.7% 136 57.1% 34 40.0%
Recent activity 173 49.0% 43 50.0% 123 51.7% 32 37.6%
Main menu 171 48.4% 45 52.3% 117 49.2% 35 41.2%
Login 166 47.0% 40 46.5% 112 47.1% 46 54.1%
Messages 165 46.7% 39 45.3% 117 49.2% 34 40.0%
Logged in user 161 45.6% 41 47.7% 110 46.2% 35 41.2%
Course overview 159 45.0% 33 38.4% 112 47.1% 36 42.4%
Course completion status 146 41.4% 31 36.0% 101 42.4% 42 49.4%
Upcoming events 146 41.4% 34 39.5% 107 45.0% 25 29.4%
Search forums 139 39.4% 34 39.5% 100 42.0% 26 30.6%
Course/site summary 130 36.8% 30 34.9% 88 37.0% 27 31.8%
People 127 36.0% 29 33.7% 92 38.7% 26 30.6%
Admin bookmarks 124 35.1% 31 36.0% 85 35.7% 18 21.2%
Remote RSS feeds 124 35.1% 28 32.6% 87 36.6% 16 18.8%
Private files 115 32.6% 30 34.9% 80 33.6% 20 23.5%
Progress Bar* 113 32.0% 33 38.4% 70 29.4% 31 36.5%
Comments 107 30.3% 31 36.0% 75 31.5% 21 24.7%
Random glossary entry 102 28.9% 30 34.9% 69 29.0% 15 17.6%
Activity results 92 26.1% 21 24.4% 66 27.7% 13 15.3%
Latest badges 86 24.4% 28 32.6% 51 21.4% 15 17.6%
Section links 86 24.4% 17 19.8% 68 28.6% 13 15.3%
Feedback 81 22.9% 17 19.8% 60 25.2% 19 22.4%
Configurable Reports* 80 22.7% 15 17.4% 53 22.3% 29 34.1%
Self completion 75 21.2% 15 17.4% 52 21.8% 13 15.3%
Quickmail* 68 19.3% 10 11.6% 57 23.9% 8 9.4%
Tags 67 19.0% 22 25.6% 42 17.6% 10 11.8%
Blog menu 63 17.8% 20 23.3% 40 16.8% 9 10.6%
Youtube 62 17.6% 18 20.9% 37 15.5% 17 20.0%
Blog tags 47 13.3% 15 17.4% 30 12.6% 6 7.1%
Network servers 45 12.7% 10 11.6% 33 13.9% 5 5.9%
Recent blog entries 43 12.2% 10 11.6% 33 13.9% 7 8.2%
Mentees 37 10.5% 13 15.1% 24 10.1% 5 5.9%
Social activities 33 9.3% 12 14.0% 19 8.0% 6 7.1%
Community finder 23 6.5% 8 9.3% 17 7.1% 3 3.5%
Flickr 15 4.2% 3 3.5% 10 4.2% 2 2.4%

Unless modified by an administrator, the default blocks added to a new course, the Site home and the Dashboard are shown in the table below. This may have had an effect on the blocks reported as being used.

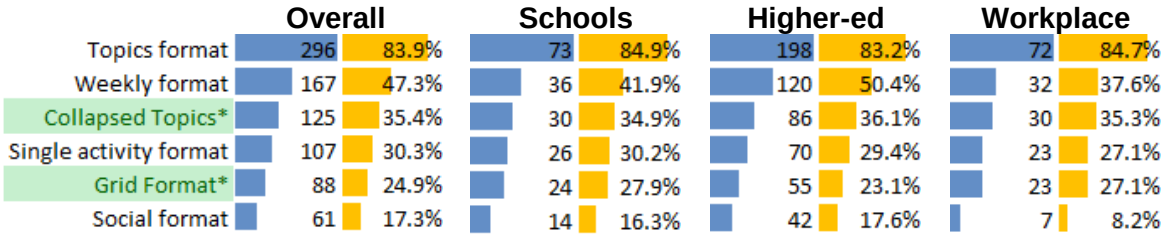
Blocks added by default

Dashboard	Default course	Site home
• Course overview • Private files • Online users • My latest badges (2.8+) • Calendar (2.8+) • Upcoming events (2.8+)	• Search forums • Latest news • Upcoming events • Recent activity	• Calendar

Calendar is reported as the most widely used block. This may indicate the importance of scheduling within courses. This block appears by default on the Site home and Dashboard pages, but other default blocks were not reported as being used as much. This usage suggests that the default blocks should be reviewed, especially on the course page.

Between sectors, blocks are used more in schools and less in workplace settings. Within the Workplace sector, the Login, Course completion and Configurable reports blocks are used relatively more than in other sectors. The Progress Bar is the most widely used contributed block, used more in Schools and Workplace sectors than Higher-ed.

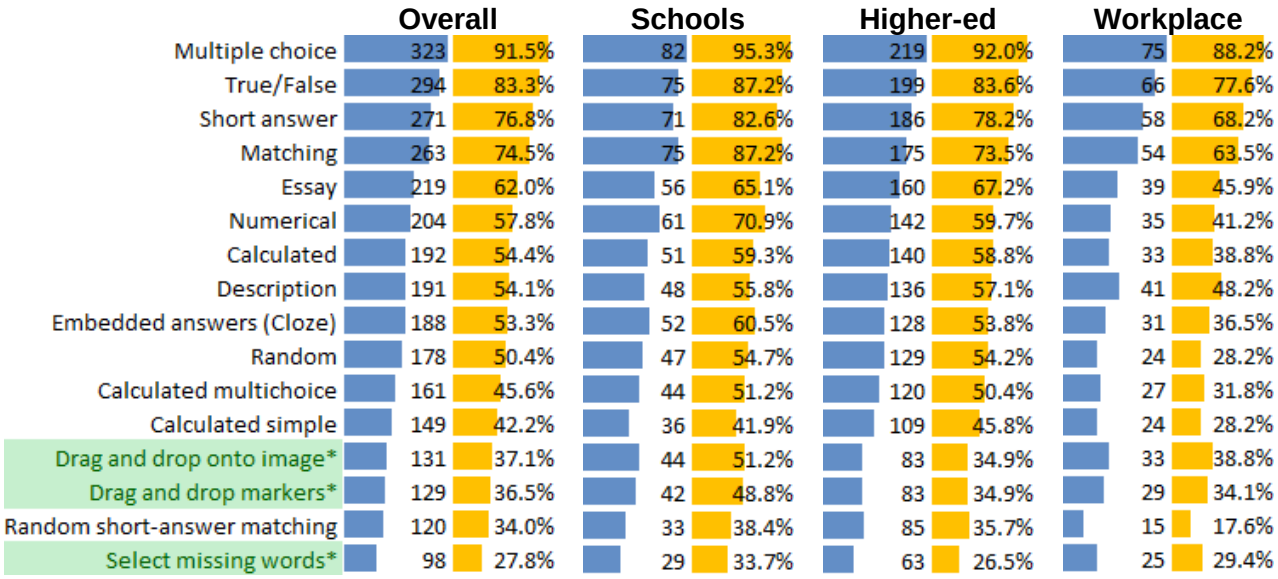
Course formats



The Topics course format is the most widely used course format. Currently the Weekly format is the default course format. Considering that the Topics format is reportedly preferred, this should change.

The contributed Collapsed Topics course format is relatively widely used by over a third of respondents. This course format could be considered for inclusion in the standard distribution or its features could possibly be incorporated into the Topics format.

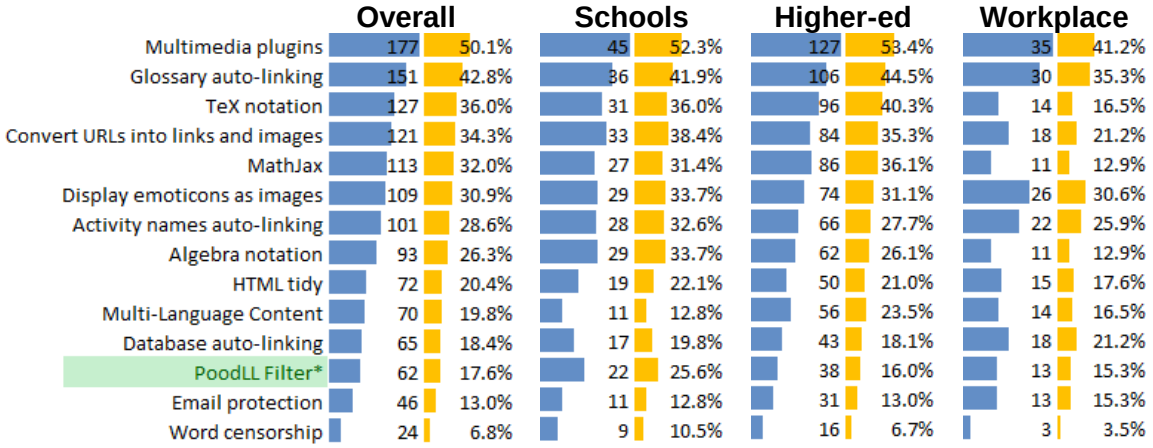
Question types



Schools tend to use question types slightly more than other sectors.

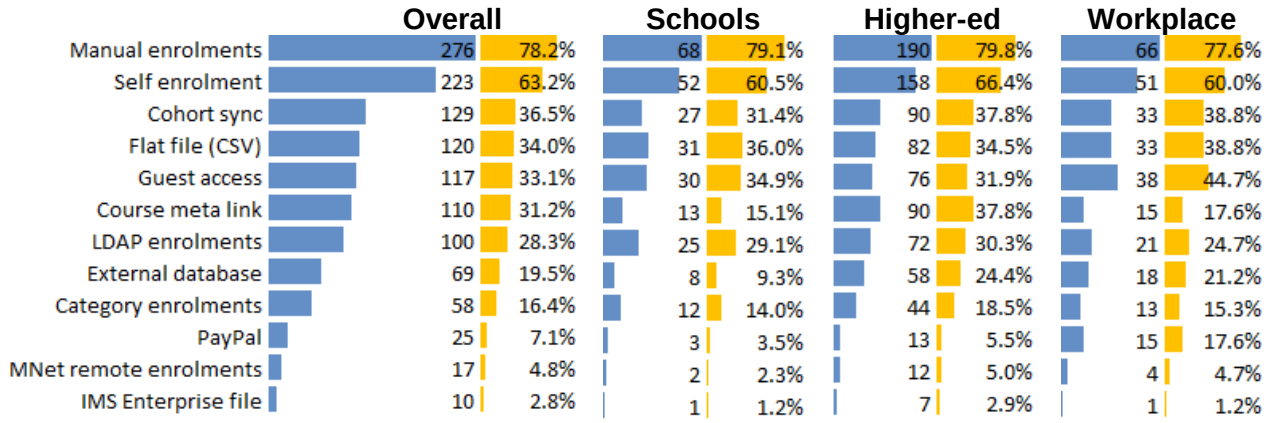
Even though they are near the bottom of the question types list, the contributed Drag-and-drop question types are used by over a third of respondents. The Select missing words question type is also widely used. These OU question types are to be added are already being added to the standard distribution in Moodle 3.0.

Text filters



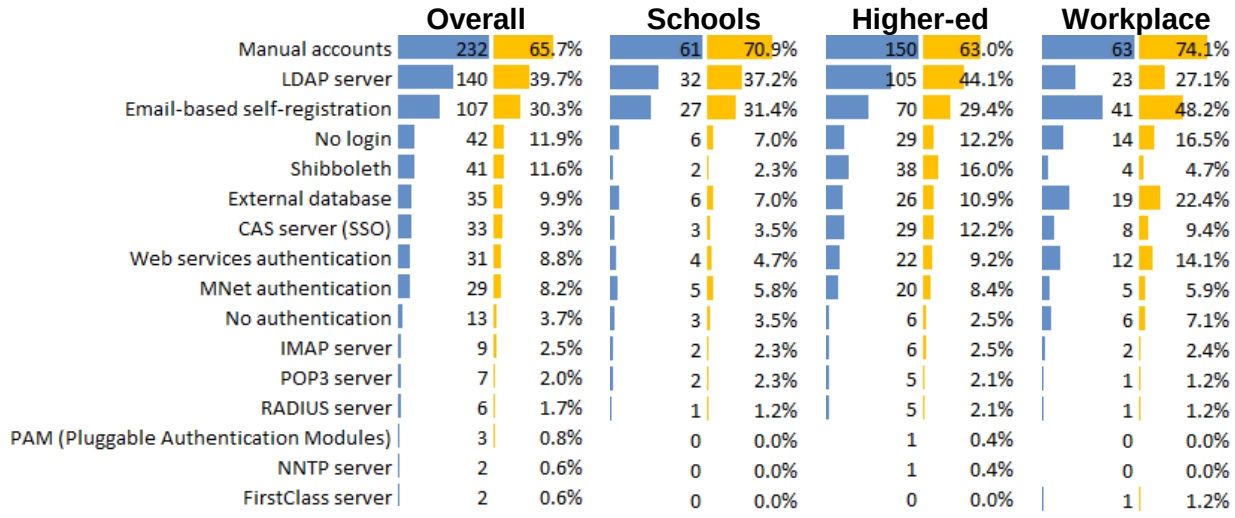
Text filters are not as widely used as other plugin types. In the Workplace sector, filters are generally used less. Mathematical text filters are used less in workplace settings as they are used in school and higher-ed contexts.

Enrolment methods



Enrolment methods are dominated by Manual and Self enrolments. IMS Enterprise file is not widely used.

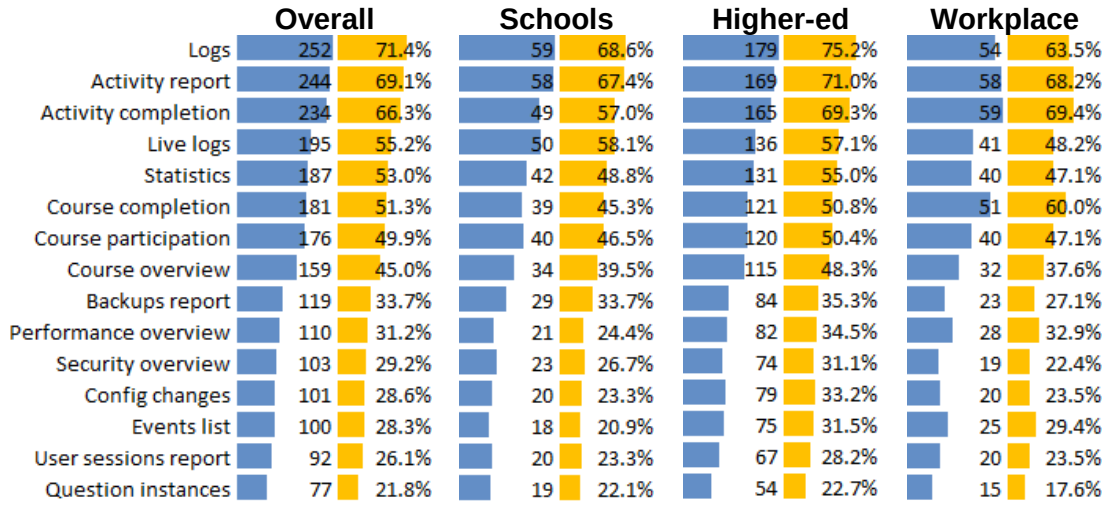
Authentication methods



The LDAP, Shibboleth and CAS authentication methods are used more in the Higher-ed sector. Email-based self-registration is use more in the Workplace sector.

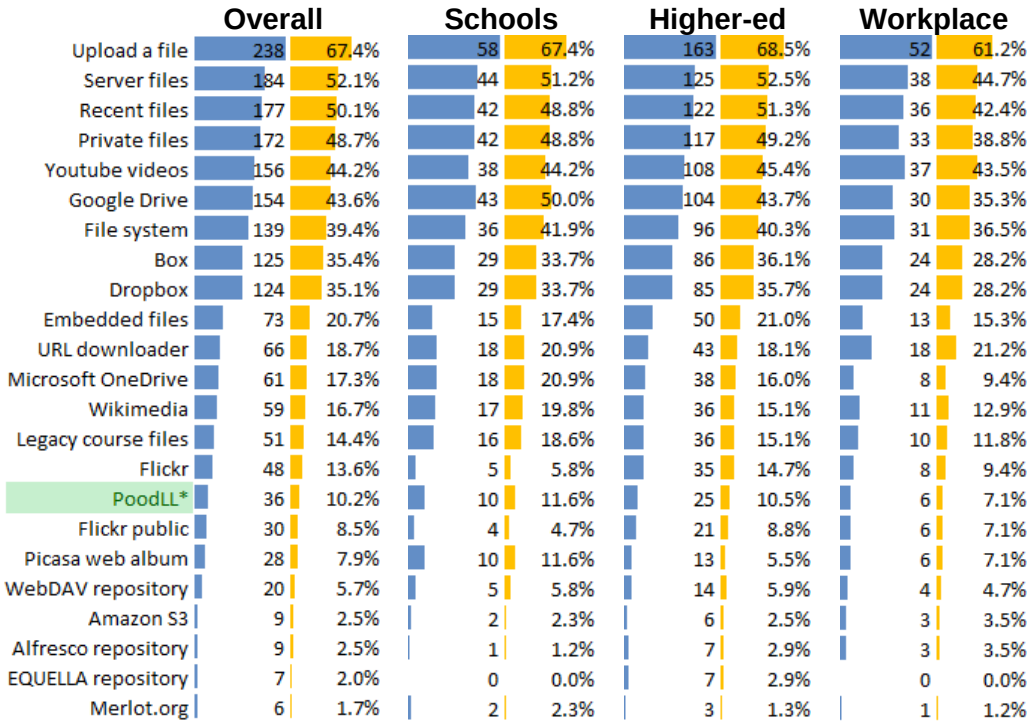
A number of standard authentication methods are rarely used. These include the IMAP server, POP3 server, RADIUS server, PAM, NNTP server and FirstClass server. Manual account authentication is the dominant method. Workplace instances use LDAP less, but self registration and external database authentication more.

Reports



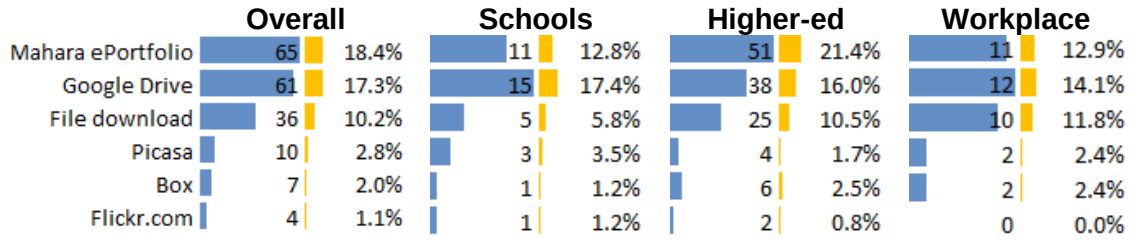
Reports are used slightly more in Higher-ed than in other sectors, except the Course completion report, which is used relatively more in the Workplace sector.

Repositories



Use of repositories is varied with the workplace sector using repository plugins relatively less. A number of repositories associated with commercial services are rarely used, including the Amazon S3, Alfresco, EQUELLA and Merlot.org repositories.

Portfolios



Portfolios are the least used plugin type within the scope of this survey. Some portfolios are rarely used, such as the Picasa, Box and Flickr repositories.

Additional plugins

Respondents were able to provide a list of additional plugins they use. Some respondents did not add any additional plugins while others added a large number more.

Plugins mentioned in this field were cleaned, sorted and counted. A number of plugins were mentioned more than 10 times.

Voluntarily Mentioned Plugins	
Attendance	45
TurnItIn	33
Group choice	22
Scheduler	20
Essential	18
Sharing cart	16
Onetopic format	15

The Attendance activity was the most mentioned with many mentions coming from the Higher-ed sector, possibly because of the inclusion of vocational education within this group. The number of mentions, being 45, is still less than other activity modules offered in the survey, however, voluntary mentions may count for more than nominating an offered choice.

TurnItIn plugins were mentioned 33 times. This includes a number of plugin varieties including multiple plugin types, so it is difficult to compare. TurnItIn plugins are proprietary and supplied by the vendor.

General comments

Respondents were also given the opportunity to offer general comments. No suggestion was given to how respondents should use this field, so a variety of responses were provided. Responses were cleaned, categorised and are paraphrased below.

- Some institutions don't allow additional plugins, so adding more plugins to the standard distribution is desirable.
- Some respondents want fewer plugins enabled by default.
- Some institutions create and use their own plugins.
- Wishes for some contributed plugins to be updated were shared.
- Some respondents delay updating Moodle until supported plugin versions are available.
- The current state of the plugins system is viewed favourably.
- Security of additional plugins is a concern to some.
- Open University plugins were endorsed.
- General thanks to developers for their efforts were provided.

Conclusions

The large number of responses from the Higher-ed sector dominates the results. It does mean other sectors are less clearly distinguishable, but some distinctions can be made.

The self-paced nature of learning in the Workplace sector is reflected in a number of plugins used there, such as those related to completion, mentoring, progress and certification. Fewer plugins are used in the Workplace setting, possibly due to a desire for simple, professional courses.

The Schools sector tends to be slightly more exploratory, adopting more blocks and other plugins. However, in many cases, the Schools sector is less distinguishable from Higher-ed.

Research questions

Motivating this survey were a set of questions that can now be answered.

What standard plugins are not used and may be removed, deprecated or fixed?

All plugins in the survey were selected by at least a couple of respondents. Plugins used by 3% of respondents or less were as follows.

- IMS Enterprise file
- IMAP server, POP3 server, RADIUS server, PAM (Pluggable Authentication Modules), NNTP server, FirstClass server
- Amazon S3, Alfresco repository, EQUELLA repository, Merlot.org repositories
- Picasa, Box, Flickr.com portfolios

These plugins could be considered for relegation to the Plugins Directory, but it could also be that these plugins are not used because they are broken or unusable and require attention. Where plugins listed above are integrations with other systems, interested parties should be involved in decisions and future maintenance.

What standard plugins are used a lot and may need more attention?

Some plugins are used relatively more than others in their plugin type and overall. Plugins used by 75% of respondents or more are as follows.

- Assignment, Quiz, Forum
- File, Label, Folder, Page, URL
- Calendar block
- Topics format
- Multiple choice, True/False, Short answer question types
- Manual enrolments

These plugins could be given additional attention to benefit more of the community.

What additional plugins (if any) should be added to the standard distribution?

A number of additional plugins were included as they were popular on the Plugins Directory. No plugin was used more than the most popular standard plugin within each plugin type, but some are used widely. Plugins used by 25% of respondents or more are as follows.

- Questionnaire (45.3%)
- Certificate (30.9%)
- Progress Bar block (32.0%)
- Collapsed Topics (35.4%)
- Drag and drop onto image (37.1%), Drag and drop markers (36.5%), Select missing words (27.8%) question types

People clearly want the functionality of the Questionnaire plugin. The Questionnaire plugin duplicates functionality of the Feedback module, which is a standard plugin. There is a current project to revise and combine Feedback and Survey and include features from Questionnaire.

The Certificate plugin is popular, particularly in the Workplace sector. The functionality of this plugin is clearly desirable. If this plugin were to be included in the standard distribution, significant recoding would be required. A “Simple Certificate” additional plugin exists.

The Progress Bar block is widely used. This plugin’s functionality is similar to that offered in the Course completion status block and it is possible that some of the functionality of the Progress Bar block could be incorporated there.

The Collapsed Topics course format is the most popular contributed course format. It offers additional functionality to the Topics format. A Collapsed Weeks format is also available. The Collapsed Topics course format could be considered for inclusion in the standard distribution or its functionality could be added to the regular Topics format, which dominates the other plugins in the course format type.

Four of the OU question types, including the Drag and drop onto image, Drag and drop markers, and Select missing words question types, are to be included in Moodle 3.0 (issue), which seems justified based on the results of this survey.

Additional changes based on usage

The list of default blocks should be reconsidered based on current usage, particularly on the course page. The Calendar block should probably be added and a number of lesser used blocks could be removed.

The current default course format is the Weekly format, however the Topics format is used far more. This default should probably change.

Recommendations based on general comments

Encouraging and assisting developers who have contributed additional plugins to keep their plugins up-to-date, as Moodle versions progress, would put people more at ease.