

Excerpts from presentation for  
Blackboard Ally EU User Group  
(25/03/21)

# Ally, a11y, and online

Fiona MacNeill

[f.macneill@brighton.ac.uk](mailto:f.macneill@brighton.ac.uk)

[@fmacneill](#)



**University of Brighton**

Information Services

# **This presentation is about Blackboard Ally...**

...it is also about the services and people that  
operate **around** Blackboard Ally

## Background : Proto Persona University of Brighton

Four campuses  
in Brighton and  
Eastbourne



### Demographic and Psychographic Details

- **Student population** 18,987
- **Staff population** 2,600
- **Schools** 13 (moving to 6)
- **Disabled students** 21%  
Learning disability: 13% or 1 in 8
- **Disabled staff** 8.8%  
as compared to sector average of 5%

### Behaviours and Actions

- Emphasis on Inclusive Practice
- Widening participation a crucial driver
- Management buy-in due to auditing functions
- Recognised need to improve resources

### Needs and Pain Points

- Student communications and support
- Limited staff resource dedicated to accessibility  
– no internal assistive tech team
- The pandemic: academic staff burnout
- Academic staff misunderstanding and apathy
- Mismatch between expectations and outcomes

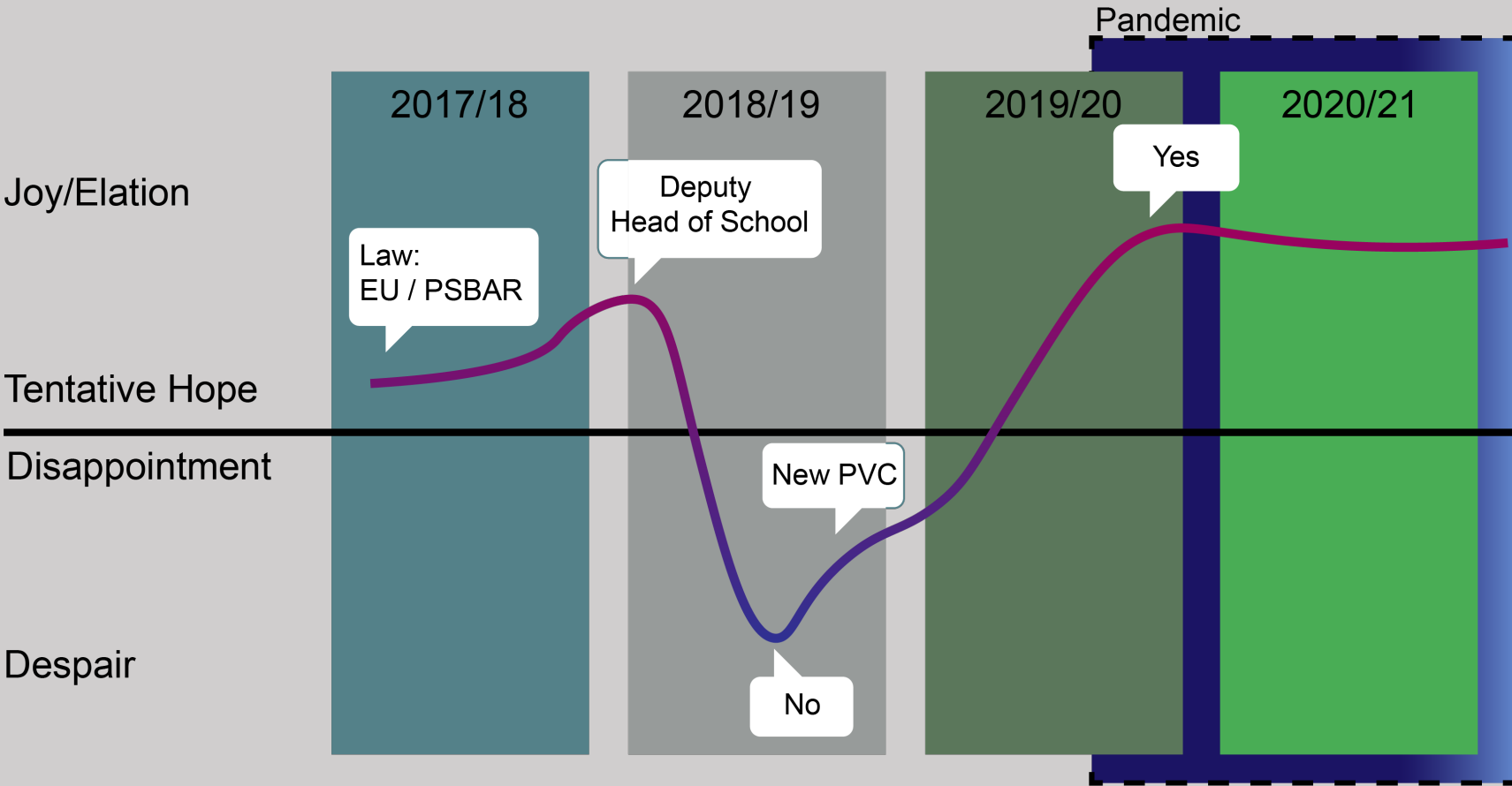
# a11y

~ a [ccessibilit] y

~ a [string of 11 characters] y



# The emotion line of **when**



# ally

~ an add-on for Blackboard VLE.

Blackboard Ally improves the experience for all users by providing alternative document formats.

Blackboard Ally provides feedback to staff so that accessibility can continually improve.

## Our **to-do** list

### 1. **Who:**

- Identify and communicate with stakeholders
- Win over hearts and minds

### 2. **What and When:** Plan for a phased roll out of Blackboard Ally

### 3. **Where and How:**

- Deliver training completely online
- Self-service training and documentation

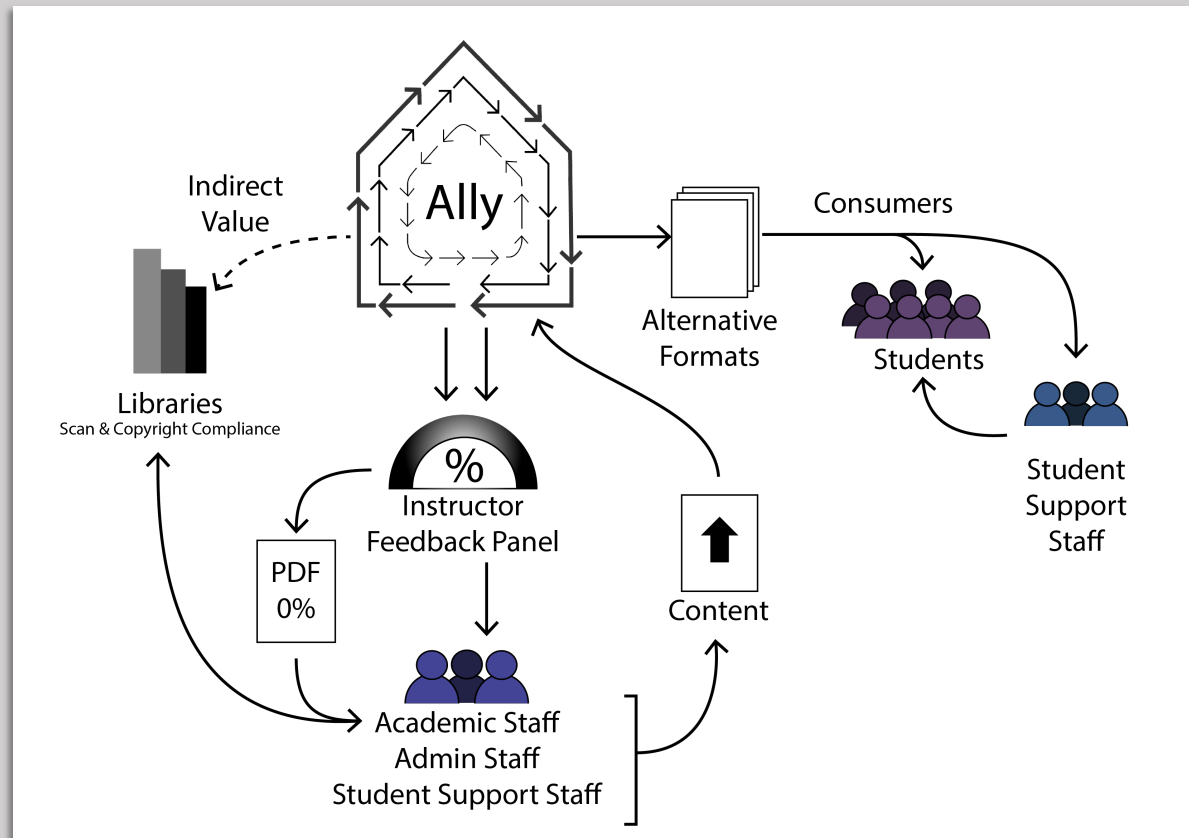


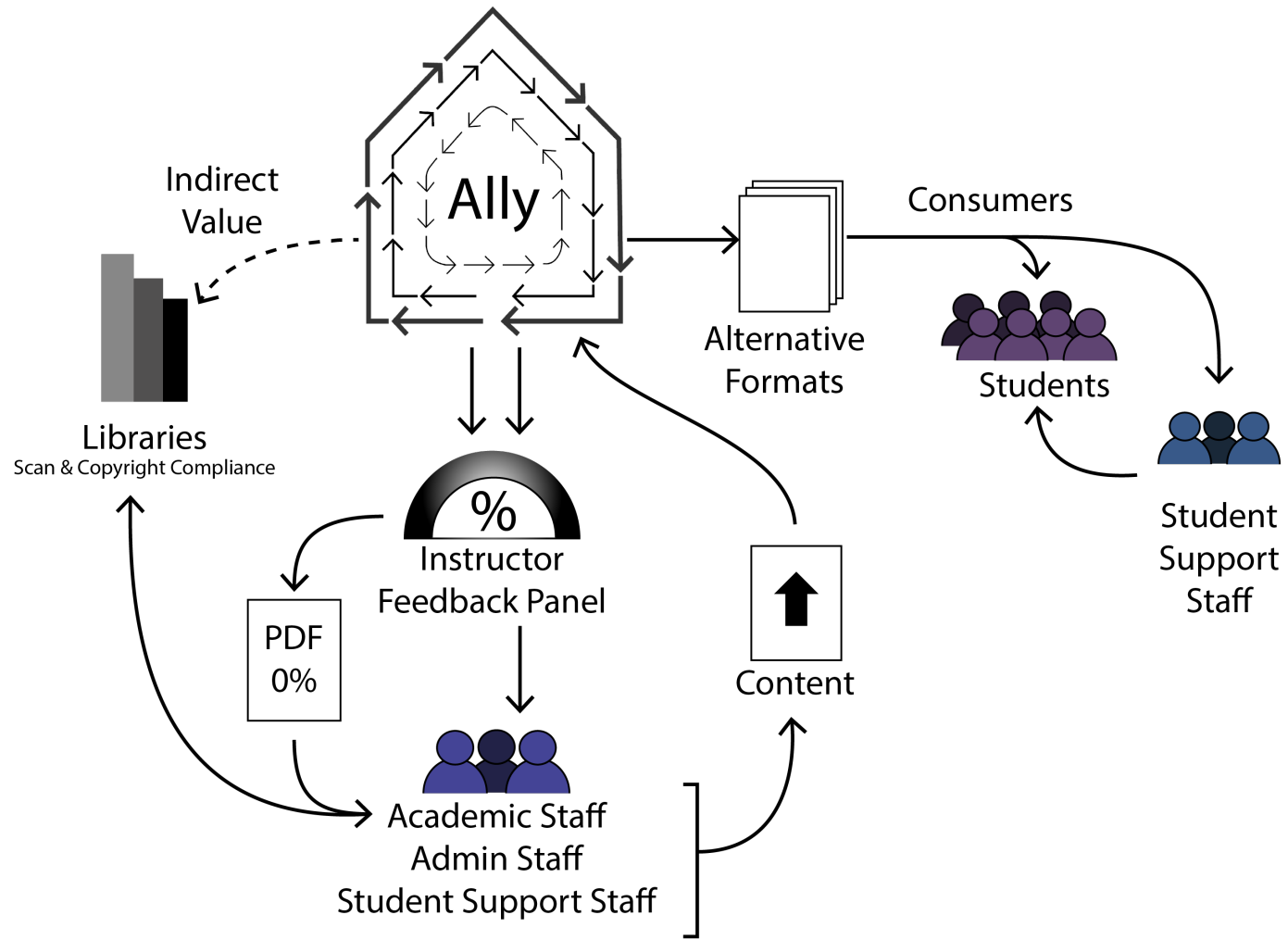
**to-do**

**1.1 Identify and communicate with stakeholders**

Always start here...

Know thy service users



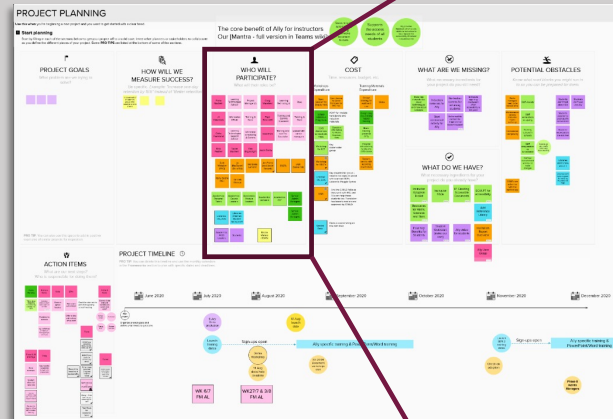


# to-do

## 1.2 Identify and communicate with stakeholders

An opportunity to build and strengthen internal collaborations

### Mural Template



## **to-do**

### **1.3 Win over hearts and minds**

#### **Key points**

Minimise tracking/auditing due to perception as surveillance.

Create a core message.

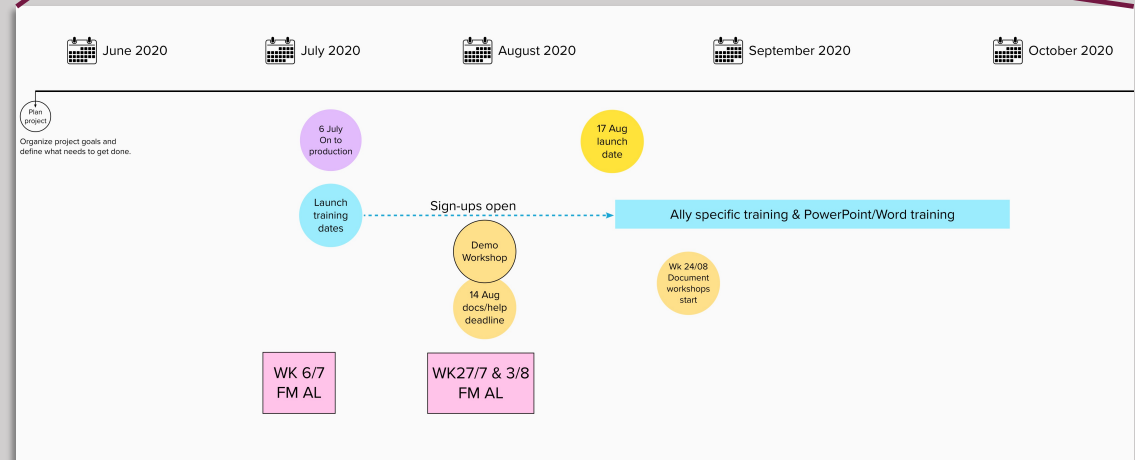
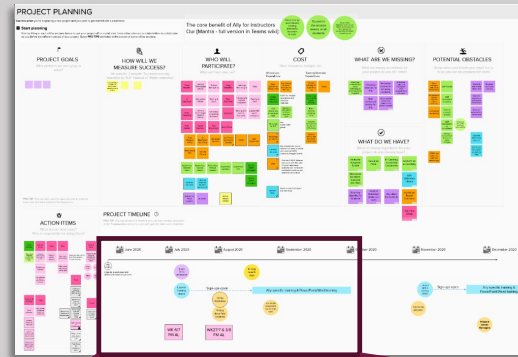
#### **Core Message – Three Things you Need to know about Ally**

1. Ally saves time by automatically creating alternative document formats
2. Ally supports the access needs of all students
3. Ally provides feedback which is only visible to instructors to help improve the accessibility of content in My Studies

**to-do**

2. Plan for a phased roll out of **Blackboard Ally**

Two phases were planned with the ethos of **improvement first, statistics later**



# online

~ the challenge of working during a pandemic even when you are *techies*

# to-do

## 3.1 Deliver training completely online

Via MS Teams but using the VLE with task scenarios

With companion session: 'Creating Accessible Digital Documents'

**Where should I start to improve the accessibility of my resources?**

Attached Files:  
B\_BbAlly\_where\_to\_start.pdf (174.794 KB)

**(1) Start with resources that have red dials.**

Update and replace the following resources first:

- Module handbooks
- Lecture slides or accompanying notes
- Resources which you require all students to read/access, e.g. articles, handouts, scanned content from books

**(2) Priority issues that Ally will flag**

Issues flagged as 'severe' in Ally which should be resolved to support student use/access.

- Potentially harmful images which can induce seizures (e.g. flashing GIFs)
- PDFs which contain no machine-readable text
- Old file formats which may not open properly or allow accessible file conversion
- Structural issues, such as no headings in a document
- Images without alternative text descriptions

**The Ally Indicator Dials**

- Needs help!
- A little better
- Almost there
- Perfect!

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**Typical tasks when using the Ally Instructor Feedback Panel**

We will work through these together.

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**Scenario 1: This week's reading**


Attached Files:  
Dublin Cinemas in 1916 The Easter Rising World War One Films and The Growth of the Middle Class Audience.pdf (413.178 KB)

Please read this PDF prior to class.

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**Scenario 2: Check and improve the accessibility of existing resources**

Lets try to fix the S.C.U.L.P.T. handout from before. We also have an image in this item which is missing descriptive text.



Let me tell you about this image...

## **to-do**

### **3.2 Self-service training and documentation**

Two pronged approach with harmonisation across the eLearning Team and the IS Workshops Training Team.

- In CPD module for staff
- In Emergency Teaching Blog
- Use of gov.uk digital standards (GDS)
- Use of S.C.U.L.P.T. acronym
- Guidance for Libraries and Service Desk
- Guidance for students



## Summary – Top 5 tips that work

1. Focus on **tool-based tasks and values** to stay concise
2. Craft consistent and **simple messages**
3. Opportunities to **collaborate** are chances to **remind and refine**
4. Celebrate and **cherish people who attend workshops/events**
5. Iterate, iterate, **iterate**

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### Images:

Beam by Bakunetsu Kaito [from the Noun Project](#);

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Plumbing by mynamepong [from the Noun Project](#); Ventilation by Seona Kim [from the Noun Project](#)