Discourse - Discussion Forum

Thomas Wong

Heriot-Watt University

5th January, 2021

The need for a discussion forum

Options at Heriot-Watt:

- Blackboard / VLE
- Teams
- Piazza*

The essentials:

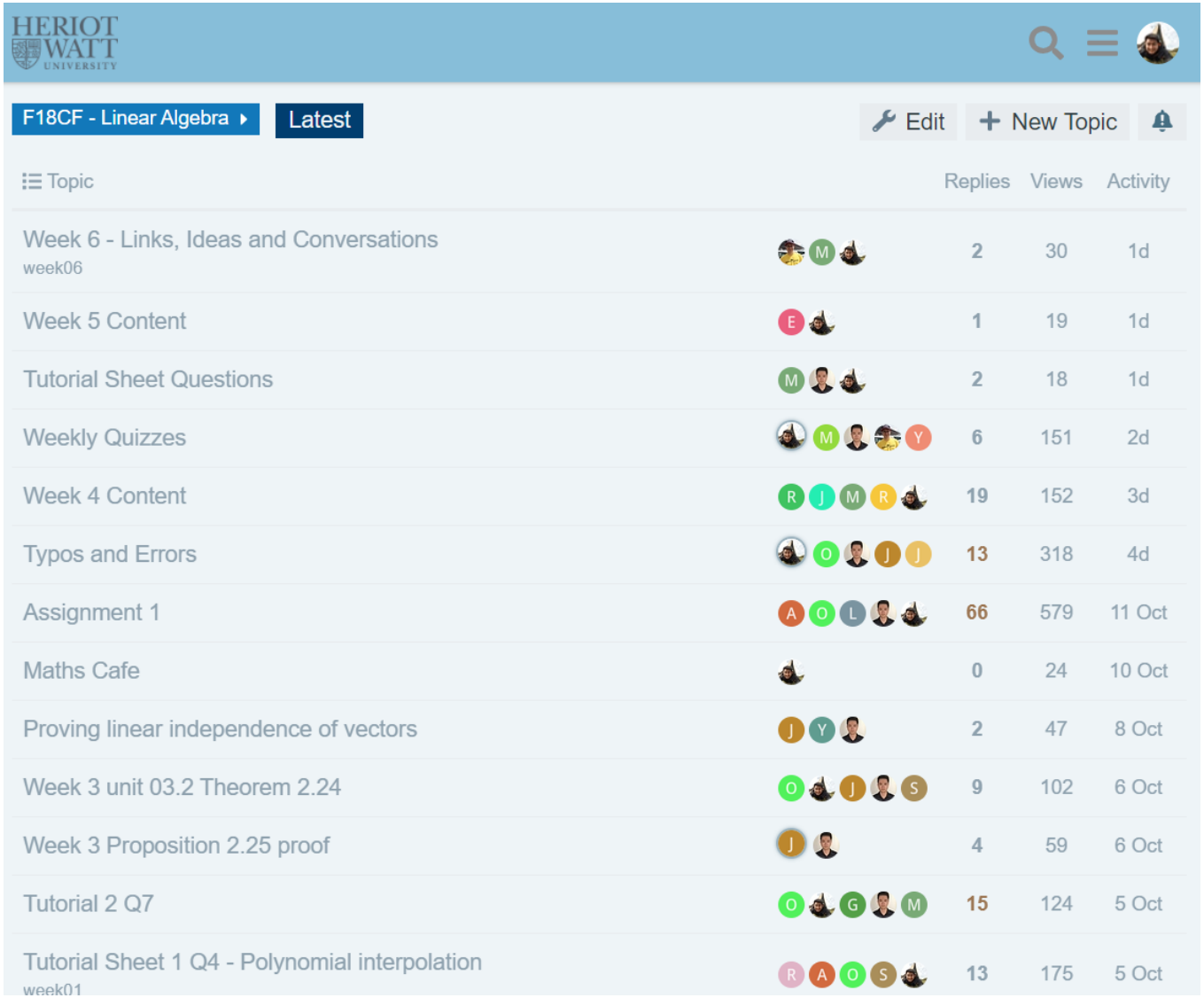
- Single Sign-on / VLE integration
- Accessible to students: navigation, threading, etc
- Supports LaTeX/MathJax, coding, and images
- Wiki-style posts
- Revision history

What can Discourse do?

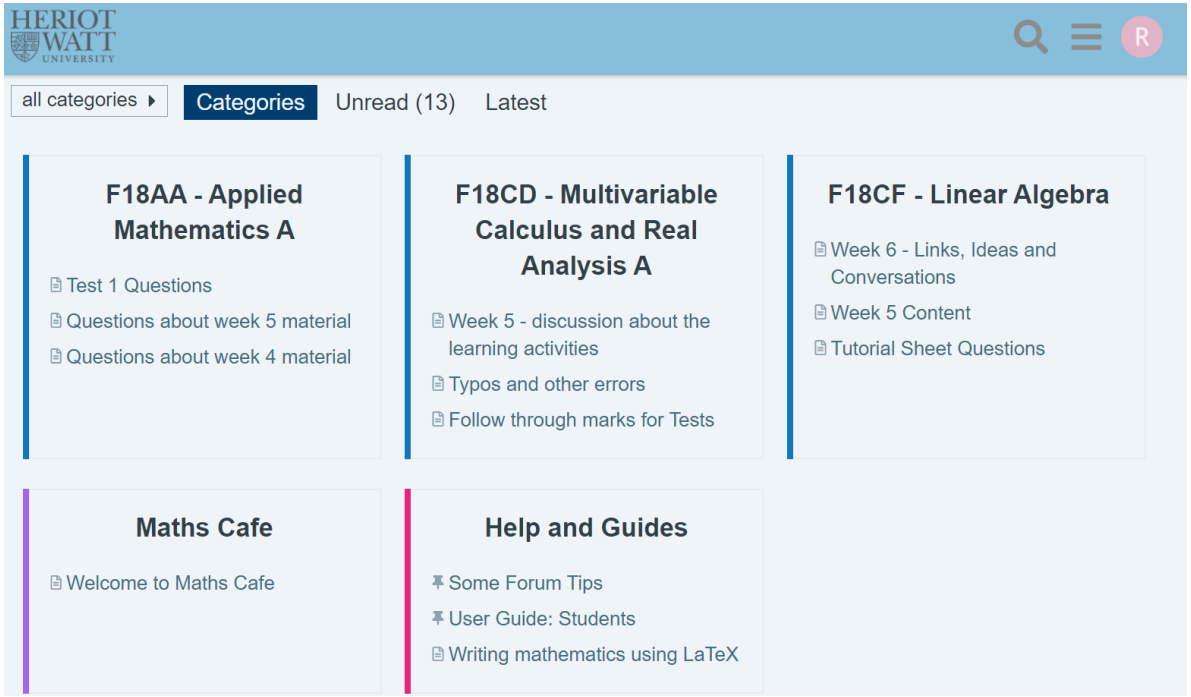
All the essentials, as well as:

- Free, open-source, locally hosted
- Easy to sign-up / interact
- Basic Polls
- Self-moderation mechanics
- Extremely customisable (appearance, templates, prompts, etc)
- Advanced features: Android/iOS apps, thread branches, search functions, badges, moderation tools, titles, groups, user/topic tags, private/group messages, URL sharing, quotes, gamification, plugins etc...

What does it look like?



What does it look like?



Interaction on several "dimensions"

- Within subjects
- Within cohort
- Between year levels

What the critics' are saying about Discourse

- I think its a lot better than the blackboard discussion forums.
- Better than Teams as well
- It is great! It gives the opportunity to share ideas/pain with others. Something that maybe would not happen otherwise. And it has Latex!
- I like how you can get a quick response from staff or peers on a question, to collectively get through things or to extend our knowledge
- Discourse is good but nothing is a substitute for face to face learning.
- Discourse is only as good as the staff / tutors that respond. It's great the students can help each other but implementing discourse if the staff are slow to respond isn't going to make a discussion board any more useful

To learn more

- Source: www.discourse.org
- Contact me: thomas.wong@hw.ac.uk

Slides: