Centre for Technology Enhanced Learning

KEATS Forums: Asynchronous communication

CONTENTS

Introduction 2

What this document covers: 2

Quick guide 3

Setting up a standard forum 3

Forum Detailed Guide 4

Setting up a standard discussion forum 4

Posting to a forum 10

Reply to Forum posts 11

Student view 12

Guidance for online communication 12

INTRODUCTION

This is one of a series of guides available from the Teaching, Learning & Assessment with Technology series. Please note, your faculty may have other approaches or use different tools, contact your Faculty TEL Officer for more information on local provision.

The forum activity allows students and teachers to exchange ideas by posting comments as part of a 'thread'. Files such as images and media maybe included in forum posts. The teacher can choose to grade and/or rate forum posts and it is also possible to give students permission to rate each other's posts.

Official Moodle Forum Video Guide.

What this document covers:

Quick guide to setting up a Forum

Detailed setup guide looking at:

- Setting up a standard discussion forum
- Posting to a forum
- Replying to forum posts
- Student view explored

Guidance for online communication from the King's governance zone

Important information

Forums can be used with pre-defined group allowing for collaborative working.

Accessibility considerations

Through the Atto text editor users can utilise the Accessibility checker and the Screen reader helper for entries.

QUICK GUIDE

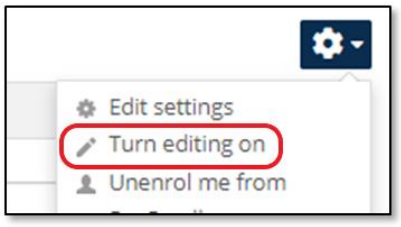
Setting up a standard forum

1. Sign into KEATS (https://keats.kcl.ac.uk) and navigate to the KEATS course you want to add the forum to.
2. **Turn editing on** in in your KEATS course and navigate to where you want to add the forum.
3. Click **Add an activity or resource** and select **Forums.**
4. Add a contextual **Forum name** and relevant **Description** including sufficient structure and guidelines on what the forum will be used for**.**
5. Under 'Forum type' select the **Standard forum for general use** from the dropdown menu.
6. Under the 'Subscription and tracking' section, set the 'Subscription mode' to **Auto subscription** from drop down menu.
7. Review the relevant settings and click the **Save and display** button at the bottom of the screen.
8. The forum will display. Click **Add new discussion topic** to create the first post.

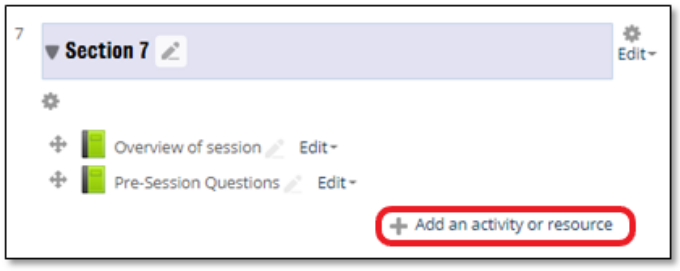
FORUM DETAILED GUIDE

Setting up a standard discussion forum

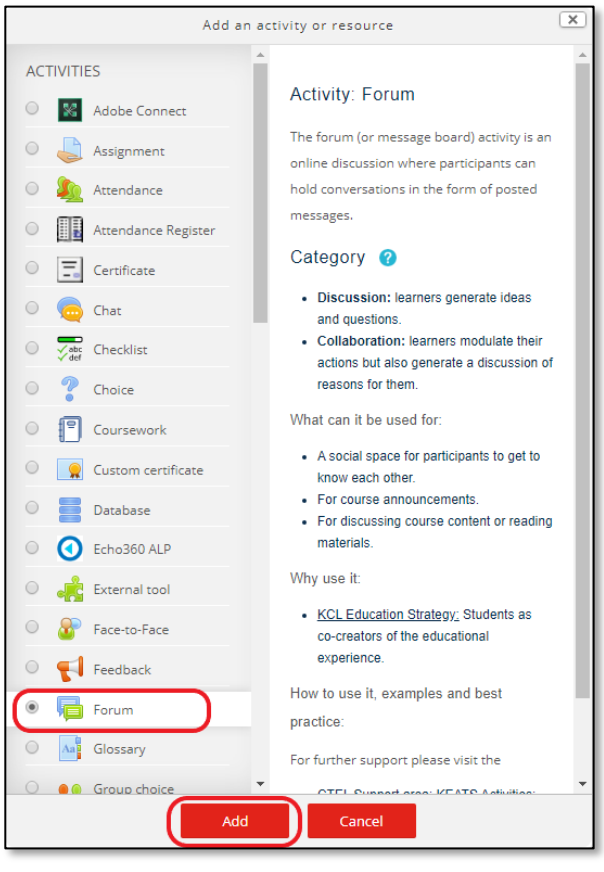
1. Navigate to KEATS (https://keats.kcl.ac.uk) and sign in using your King's credentials (your K Number and password).
2. Access the KEATS Course/Module you want to add the Forum to.
3. Click the cog in the top right-hand corner and **Turn editing on.**



4. Navigate to the section of KEATS you want to add the Forum to and select **Add an activity or resource.**

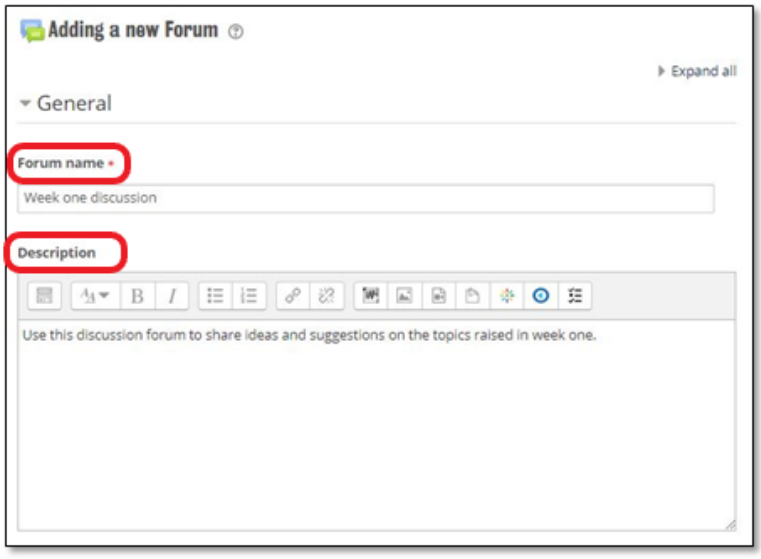


5. Select **Forums** from the 'Activities' section of the pop up and click **Add.**

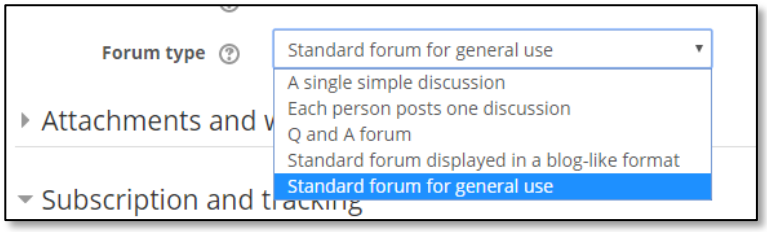


6. Add a **Forum name** and relevant **Description:**

Forum Name:	• This displays on your Moodle space front page as the link to your forum. Students should know what they will get to before they click, so craft a phrase which balances brevity, appeal and description.
Description:	• This is the **first thing students see** when enter the forum, so it's where to put your **instructions** and **rationale**. • Like many learning activities, **without a clarity of purpose and expectations, discussion forums suffer from inhibited, uneven participation**. This is particularly true for inexperienced learners. Students may 'talk past' each other, offering their own opinions and experiences competitively without really engaging with others, or offering superficial responses to others' contributions without engaging in critical debate – you may need to give explicit examples of how to discuss critically yet constructively. • **To clarify expectations, introduce some focusing constraints** such as word count, number of posts, genre and responding as well as posting – these prompt students to digest and distil their thinking and elicit contributions that other students will be curious to read. • **Be succinct and inviting** in the description, linking out to more guidance (e.g. examples, how to disagree constructively) if necessary. • **Think twice before checking the box** to 'Display the description on the front page' since this reduces the 'glanceability' (navigational effectiveness) of the front page. Make the forum name intuitive instead.

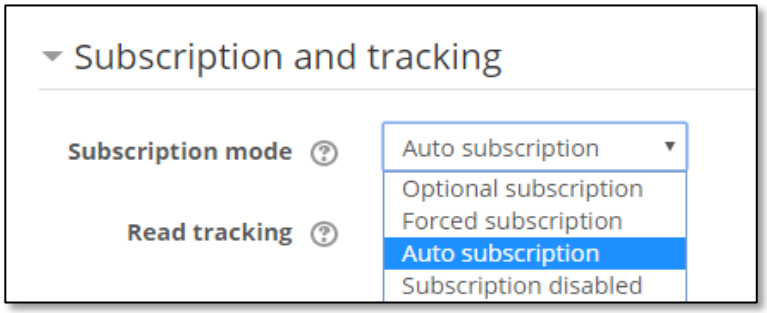


7. Select the appropriate **Forum type** from the dropdown list (explanation below). There are a five option to select. For this guide, select the **Standard forum for general use**.



A single simple discussion	Dedicated to just one discussion topic or thread. Students respond to a single question or prompt, and the responses display on one page. This is a highly focused type of forum with the trade-off that students cannot initiate new discussion threads.
Each person posts one discussion	Each student can start a discussion thread of their own, and other students can respond. Discussions are displayed as a list of topics, dates, and contributors.
Q and A forum	You initiate with a prompt; each student must respond to that prompt in order to see others' responses. This forum type requires students to compose their own original response without being diverted or influenced by others'. It plays on their curiosity to see how others have responded. Discussions are displayed as a list of topics, dates, and numbers of responses.
Standard forum for general use	Anyone can initiate a discussion thread and anyone can respond. Discussions are displayed as a list of topics, dates, and contributors. This forum type can become unfocused, so if you want every student to have a thread of their own or be able to keep track of responses, try one of the options above. However, Moodle does let you curate discussions – if, say, they diverge from the main topic. You can split tangents into new discussion threads with new titles, and you can also edit the title of an existing discussion to make it more meaningful.
Standard forum displayed in a blog-like format	'Blog-like format' here means that the first few lines of each discussion thread display on the forum's front page with replies behind a link.

8. Click on **Subscription and tracking** and select an appropriate subscription option. For this guide, select **Auto subscription**.



The different options are described below. Subscription here means that students receive one email notification per post by default (though see below for ways to manage this volume of messages).

Optional subscription	Participants are unsubscribed initially and can choose to subscribe. Since people tend to stay with the defaults, this is likely to lead to students being oblivious to the posts unless they are reminded to subscribe.
Forced subscription	Everyone is subscribed and cannot unsubscribe. This option may be best reserved for your Announcements forum. However, you could facilitate the forum so that every message was focused and relevant.
Auto subscription	Everyone is subscribed initially but can choose to unsubscribe. This option balances a default which raises awareness of the messages with the freedom to unsubscribe.
Subscription disabled	Nobody can subscribe by email, and without other motivating factors students may be oblivious to the posts.

Separately Moodle allows everyone to configure how they receive email **notifications**. You can signpost students to how to receive **digests** of the day's messages, for example.

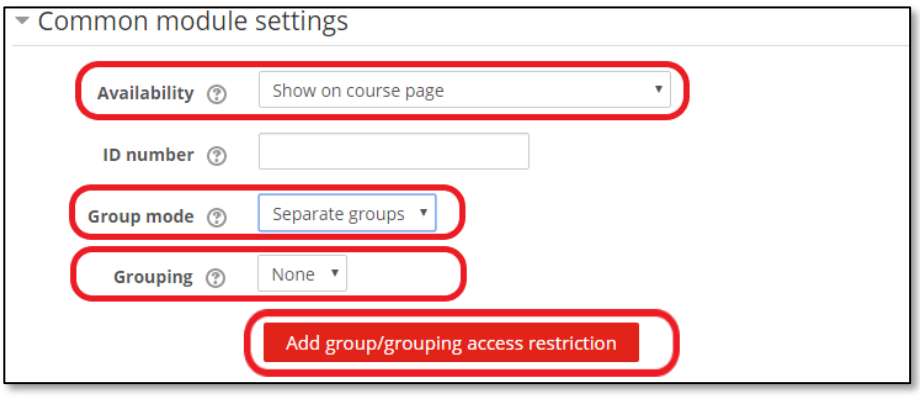
9. Under the 'Common module settings' section set the 'Availability' to **Show on course page** from the dropdown menu.

10. If you are using groups, set the 'Group mode' option to the either **Separate groups** or **Visible groups**. The difference is that under **Separate groups**, member of a group cannot see other group forums, only their own. If groups are not needed, leave the selection to **No groups**.

    a. 'Grouping' is dependent on the 'Group mode' selection. If the option of **No groups** has been selected, the 'Grouping' option is not available. If the 'Group mode' is set to **Visible groups** or **Separate groups**, you can select the 'Grouping' setting in the course. This will allow the groups to work together.

    b. If the 'Group mode' is set to **Visible groups** or **Separate groups**, you can restrict access to the Forum by clicking the **Add group/grouping access restriction** button. This will add the group restriction to the **Restrict access** section.

    c. NB: 'Grouping' is a collection of groups in a course.



Further information on Groups

Some forum purposes benefit from contributions from the **entire cohort** – for example inviting students to post questions, news, events or information relevant to everyone in the cohort. Students often respond to fellow students' questions more quickly than staff can get to them, building social bonds of mutual good will. Educators can then check the responses for sense and accuracy and supplement as needed. They also learn from them.

Other forum purposes benefit from allocating students into **smaller discussion groups** where every member can make a contribution and engage thoughtfully with every other member's in turn.

It's straightforward to set up groups in Moodle and **students can be in different groups at once** – these only come into effect if you apply them to an activity (here, a forum). The group mode you choose in the Forum settings depends on the purpose of your forum.

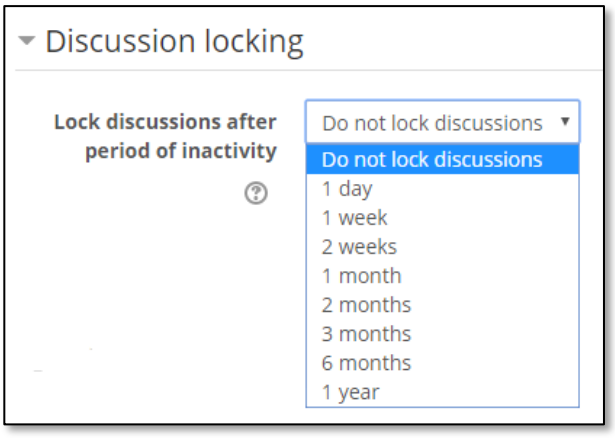
If you expect students to respond in different ways and that there will be **mutual curiosity**, you can ask them to respond individually. Alternatively Moodle allows you to set up groups.

Visibility: If you expect similar responses from each group, or if you think they may be diverted or influenced by each others' responses, then set groups to be **invisible** to other groups (the setting here is '**separate groups**'); this encourages students to concentrate on generating their own original responses. You can change this setting at any time – **'Visible** groups' can see each others' posts but can only contribute in their own group.

Aim for a **group size** which is large enough not to collapse if a few members don't participate, and large enough to bring diversity of opinion, but small enough that all members have a chance to participate and everyone can give due consideration to all the posts in the time they have available.

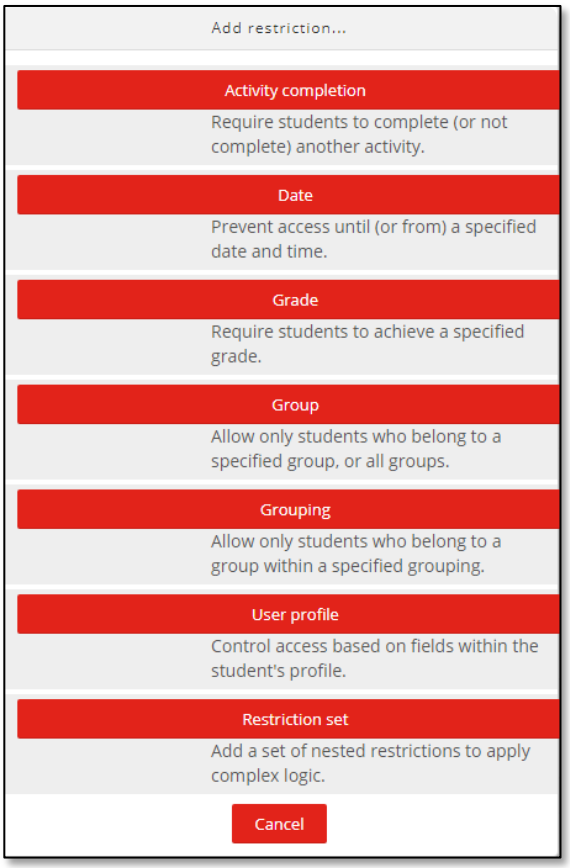
One last thing to say about groups is that you can, if needed, make any forum **available to just one sub-set of groups** (this is called a 'Grouping'). For example, this could be useful if you have different cohorts working to different dates and instructions but sharing a single Moodle space.

11. **Discussion locking** - Discussions can be automatically locked after a specified time has elapsed since the last reply. This can be from 1 day to 1 year. Users with the capability to reply to locked discussions can unlock a discussion by replying to it.

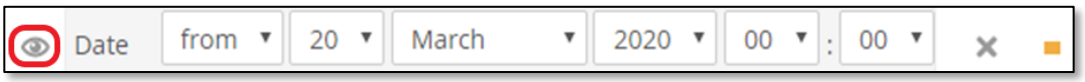


12. **Activity Completion** - If you have, for example, asked students to initiate a certain number of discussions and/or post a certain number of responses, it is possible to emphasise this expectation with this setting.

13. **Restrict access** - You can add Restrictions under the Restrict access tab. This will ensure that the forum will only be available to a group of students or on a particular date. Click Add restriction and select the appropriate restriction from the options available.



If you want the forum to be hidden completely until the restriction is met or from students who do not meet the restriction click on the eye icon alongside the restriction.



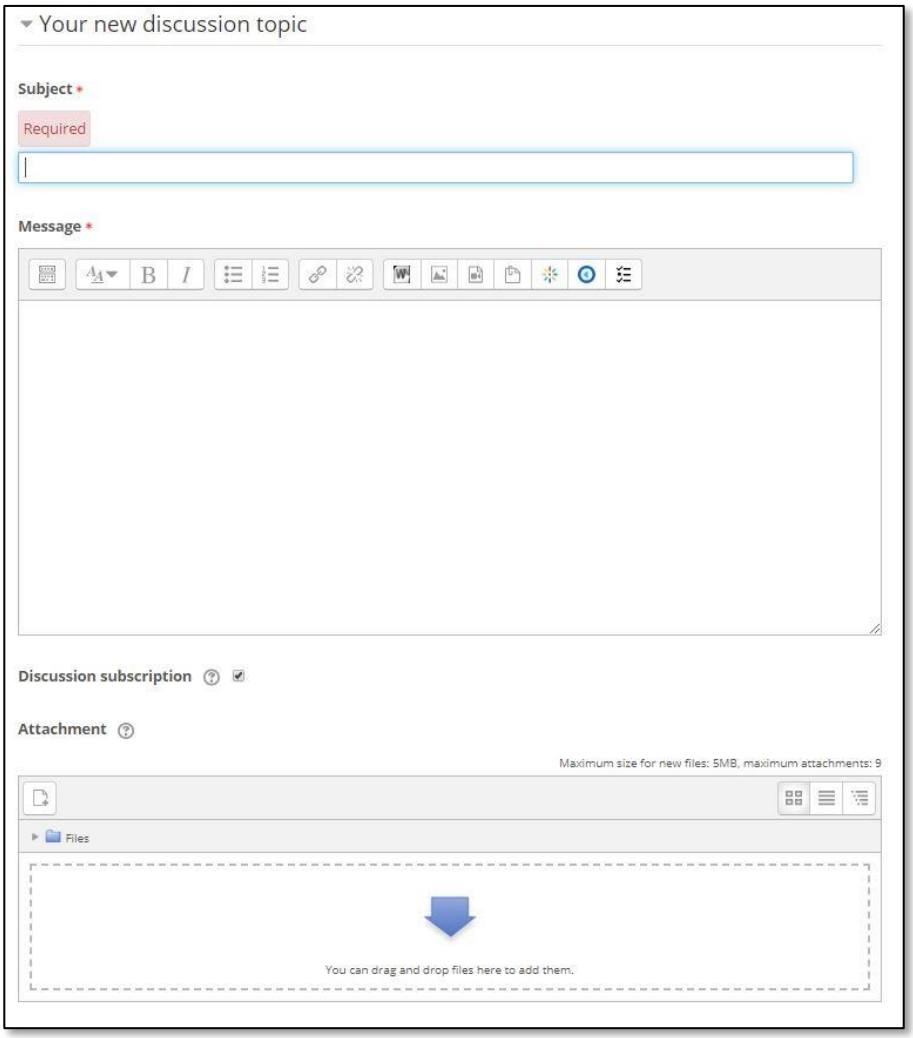
14. Click **Save and display.**
15. Click **Add new discussion topic** to create the first post.

Posting to a forum

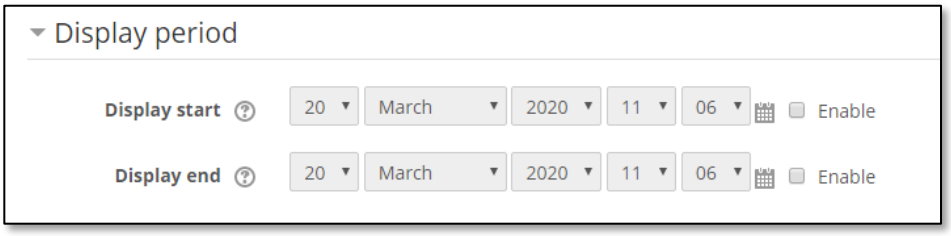
Forums are organised into discussion threads which have one or more messages within them.

1. Once a forum has been created, you can add discussion topics to it. Select the **Forum** link from your module homepage and click **Add a new discussion topic**.

2. Add a **Subject** and **Message** to the discussion topic. Use the WYSIWYG editor to format the message, add link or images.
3. Add an **Attachment** if required.



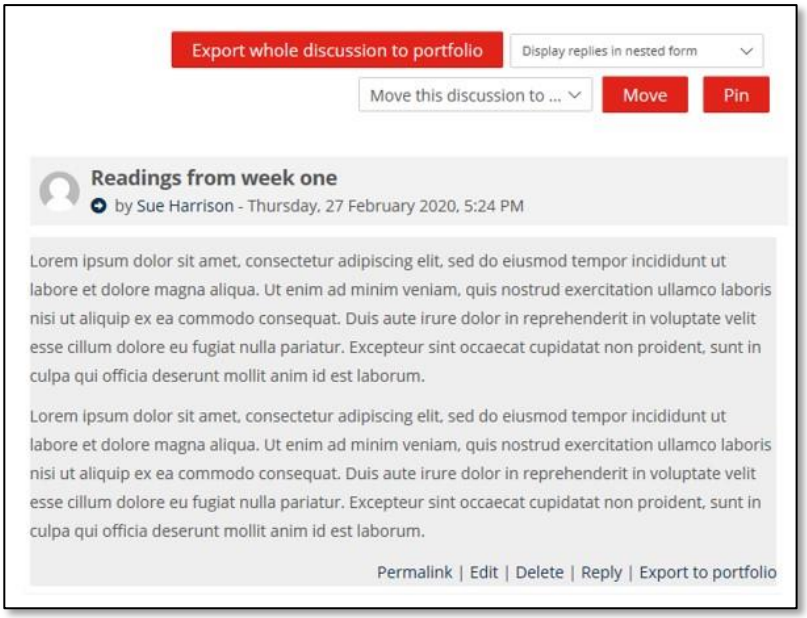
4. Set a **Display period** for the discussion if required. This defines the period when a post is displayed on the forum. The **Enable** box must be ticked in order to activate this tool



5. Click **Post to forum** to publish your discussion post.

Reply to Forum posts

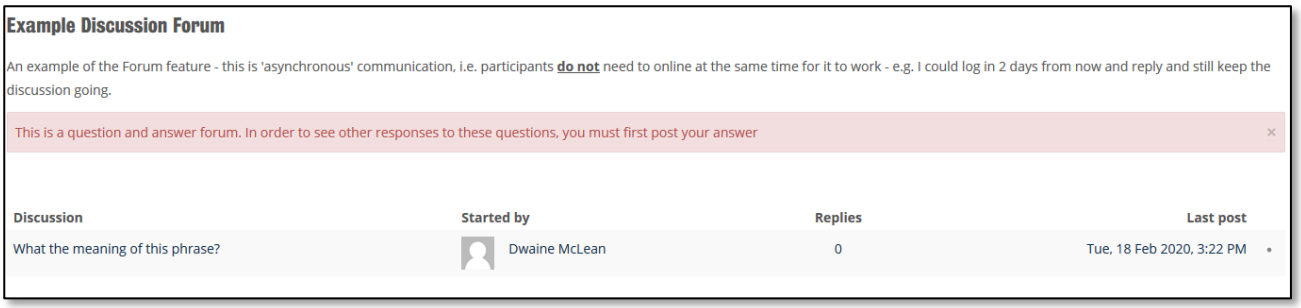
1. Most discussion forums allow for an individual to reply to another post.
2. Navigate to the discussion topic message you wish to reply to and select **Reply** from the menu at the bottom of the message.



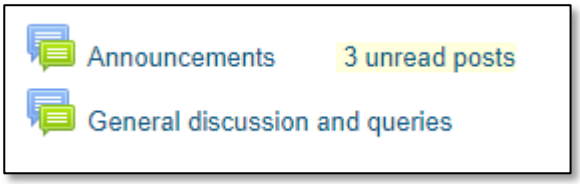
3. A WYSIWYG editor will display allowing you to add your **Message**, format it and add images/links as required.
4. You have the option to add an **Attachment** if required.
5. Unless you check **'Email notifications without editing time delay'** KEATS (Moodle) allows 30 minutes before sending your message, so you can make changes.
6. Click the **Submit** button to post your reply.

Student view

Your students will see the below view when clicking on a forum.



If students are not subscribed to a forum, they will not receive notifications about new posts to a forum. Instead, unread forum posts will be indicated with an unread count/number next to the forum.



GUIDANCE FOR ONLINE COMMUNICATION

King's College London is proud to foster an environment where critical thinking and vibrant debate is encouraged. Guidance for online communication has been produced and is available from King's Governance Zone.