



UCD Virtual Learning Environment (VLE): Standards

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Introduction

Every academic module in UCD, whether face-to-face, blended or online should be provided for in Brightspace. In so doing, each provision contains a view of the module descriptor and the up-to-date class lists, which are integrated from Banner. Every student has access to their academic modules on Brightspace, where they expect to find the learning materials and activities, assessments and related feedback.

We know from student engagement, research and praxis that students want navigation that is consistent and simple. Information, learning materials and activities that are easy to find, and resources that are accessible, organised and designed to support their learning.

In the Education and Student Success Strategy 2020-2024 a commitment was made to enhance the experience of the VLE and linked to this is the development of a policy that sets standards that are appropriate to the disciplinary context in which modules are developed and delivered. This initiative is part of a wider approach to support student feedback, academic advising and to develop new approaches to assessment in the online teaching context.

It is also embedded in the large range of support, resources, workshops and training in the VLE developed by UCD Teaching and Learning, UCD IT Services and UCD Estates to enhance and support teaching and learning in both our online, blended and face to face contexts.

Purpose

- To provide a consistent user experience for students and those that teach and support learning
- To enhance the clarity of information provided to students and encourage active participation in their own learning.
- To ensure that all learning materials provided to students are accessible and designed to adhere to Universal Design Principles
- To provide a parity of experience for students across different modules as appropriate to the discipline that they are studying.
- To provide a solid foundation upon which faculty, School Heads of Teaching and Learning and Educational Technologists can further develop; face-to-face, online and blended modules that promote, and enhance student engagement.

Who are standards for?

- Students
- Faculty
- Educational Technologists
- Schools Heads of Teaching and Learning
- All who teach and support learning



Core Principles

- Each module will provide a clearly defined, accessible and consistent structure within the VLE (relevant to the effective delivery of the learning outcomes).
- All students will be able to access relevant information to support their learning in their VLE modules e.g. module outcomes, session details, learning activities, assessments, feedback etc.
- Each VLE module will make provision for Universal Design, by enabling students to engage in multiple means and methods that support their autonomous learning.
- All students will expect to find the standards applied across all modules they undertake within the VLE.
- Each module will be reviewed regularly to enable adaptation and enhancement to reflect emerging needs of learners and faculty.

Support and Guidance

There is a wide range of support and workshops available with reference to teaching and learning in the VLE from UCD Teaching and Learning, UCD IT Services and UCD Estates. UCD's Educational Technologists Advisory Network (ETAN) through collective collaboration amongst members also provides support and sharing of good practice across programmes in the University.

School Heads of Teaching and Learning as part of their role in programme review, curricular review should also ensure that this policy is included in part of ongoing discussions about curriculum review and development. All VLE materials should be GDPR compliant and in line with EDI and Universal Design principles.

Each School will be responsible, with student representatives, for auditing their implementation of the VLE standards. This should be conducted as appropriate to the subject area and specific subject/disciplinary context.

VLE Module Standards Framework - Implementation

The following outlines how to review and implement the VLE Standards within a Brightspace module and relates specifically to the "My Learning" section of the module.

The VLE Standards require that, at a minimum, the following Units are included in all academic modules within the My Learning area of Brightspace;

1. Welcome,
2. Assessment Information
3. Weekly or Topic structure for learning materials
 - 3.1. Module Coordinators should agree what structure best suits their own module delivery style or format.

Details on each unit, including its purpose, is described below, as well as an explanation as to how to ensure the VLE standards are being adhered to.



- **Welcome Unit**

The purpose of the Welcome Unit is to engage the learner with any necessary information prior to undertaking the module. You may wish to also include information around setting out expectations as to how the module will be delivered, and what is to be expected of the student. This serves as a point of orientation and socialisation for the student.

The Welcome Unit should include, at a minimum:

- An overview or brief description of the module
- An introduction to faculty and the wider teaching team
- Contact information/hours for the teaching team

You may wish to also consider providing details such as:

- The module structure: a note on the format of how the module is to be delivered e.g. lectures, tutorials, seminars, labs, etc
- The module learning outcomes
- The teaching and learning strategy e.g. individual and group work, reflective learning, case-based learning, critical writing, student presentations, guest speakers etc
- Academic integrity: record whether / to what extent AI may be used on your module in the Approaches to Teaching & Learning

Note: This information could also be presented using the Welcome Widget¹.

- **Assessment Information Unit**

All modules should provide clear direction as to how the students engage with the module assessment strategy, outlining precisely what is required, by when, and how to submit summative assessment materials.

It should also be made clear how and when feedback on assessments will be made available.

The Assessment Information Unit should include:

- An overview of assessment types in use on the module (referencing the Assessment Strategy for the module)
- Independent links to all credit-based assessment activities
 - This should include - Quizzes, Assignments, Graded Discussions and any external assessment tools being used such as Peer Review etc.
- Expectations for citation methods within the module
- Whether the use of generative artificial intelligence, or other machine learning technology, is permitted.
- Feedback approach e.g., clear expectations as to how, when and where to receive feedback on assessed work, as per academic regulations

¹ See Related Documents section at the end of this document for more information.



- **Weekly/Topic Unit**

All modules should ensure that the Learning Materials area is presented in a cohesive and clear manner, using 'units'.

The purpose of weekly or topic Units is to present learning materials and associated learning activities to students in a clear and consistent easy to follow manner.

Note: these unit names can be amended by you to support specific teaching preferences as long as a clear structure is being adhered to.

Units should:

- Adhere to a clear, consistent and easy to follow naming convention, which should be implemented throughout the module.
- Units should be clearly labelled by topic / theme / week. e.g. Week 1- Introduction to Ethics, Week 2 - Ethics & Business, Week 3 - Ethics in the Workplace etc.
- Learning activities (e.g. formative assessment opportunities, discussion threads, quizzes, virtual classroom sessions etc) and learning materials/content (e.g. slides, texts, data etc.) are best presented logically and sequentially organised within each learning unit
 - where possible keep activities and content that relate to the same theme / topic / week together in a learning unit. e.g Week 1 Lecture Notes, Week 1 Discussion Board, Week 1 Self Reflection Assignment
- Ensure that there is a minimum amount of 'sub-units' in use i.e., avoid multiple layers where students have to click down into subunits (folders) to access the resource/content.

General Guidance applicable to all Units

- Ensure that the accessibility score for all materials in the VLE has been reviewed by using the accessibility checker tool, Ally.
- Learning materials can be presented in varying forms, such as a video, audio, concise and easy to read text, using an existing template, or links to relevant external materials.
- Consider the University's Academic Integrity policy and ensure that expectations from students are clearly set out within your module.
- Use of originality checker for assignments

Related Documents

- Teaching and Learning Guidelines for presenting your module in Brightspace:
<https://www.ucd.ie/teaching/resources/technologyenhancedlearning/blendedandonlinelearningdesign/development/#d.en.479085>
- UCD Academic Integrity Policy -
https://hub.ucd.ie/usis/IW_HU_MENU.P_PUBLISH?p_tag=GD-DOCLAND&ID=274
- Providing Feedback in Brightspace:
<https://www.ucd.ie/teaching/resources/technologyenhancedlearning/ucdeducationaltechnologies/brightspace/providingfeedbackinbrightspace/>



- IT Services - Digital Learning Webpage for Instructors:
<https://www.ucd.ie/itservices/ourservices/educationaltechnologies/digitallearning-instructors/>
- UCD Accessibility Resources:
<https://www.ucd.ie/all/ucdstudents/support/digitalsupport/digitalaccessibility/allyforucdstaff/>
- How to Create a module Welcome Widget:
https://fujitsuireland.service-now.com/itucd?sys_id=057ba8dd1b5f05502dda7d55464bcb1f&id=kb_article_ucd&sysparm_rank=1&sysparm_tsqueryId=a7e5bae087e24a1075e431973cbb35d7

Appendix 1

Appendix 1 provides an example of the structured layout of the VLE Standards within a module in Brightspace.

The screenshot displays a Brightspace interface for a module. At the top, a navigation bar includes links for 'My Learning', 'Assessment', 'Discussions', 'My Class', 'Library', 'Student Feedback', and 'Module Tools'. Below this, a sidebar on the left contains a search bar and a list of widgets: 'Welcome' (highlighted with a blue border), 'Assessment Information', and three 'Week/Topic' widgets labeled 'Week/Topic 1', 'Week / Topic 2', and 'Week/ Topic 3'. The main content area features a 'Welcome' heading, a decorative image of a desk with a notebook, a pen, and a teapot, and a 'Brief module description' section. This section includes a placeholder text 'Add here a summary or brief description of the module' and instructions on how to edit the page by clicking on the down arrow next to the page title at the top of the page and then clicking on 'Edit html'.



Appendix 2

Appendix 2 provides an example of how subunits may be used effectively to signpost students to key information within individuals weeks or topics.

The screenshot displays the UCD Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) interface. At the top, a navigation bar includes links for 'My Learning', 'Assessment', 'Discussions', 'My Class', 'Library', 'Student Feedback', and 'Module Tools'. Below this, a secondary bar features a '+ New Unit' button, a settings gear icon, a toggle switch, a 'Hidden' label, and buttons for 'Add Existing' and 'Create New'. A search bar labeled 'Search titles, descriptions' is positioned on the left. The main content area is titled 'Week/Topic 1' and contains two paragraphs of text. The left sidebar lists course units: 'Welcome', 'Assessment Information', 'Week/Topic 1' (highlighted with a blue border and a dropdown arrow), 'Lecture slides', 'Ethics and Future Directions', 'Recorded Lectures', and 'Supplimentary Reading'.

My Learning Assessment ▾ Discussions My Class ▾ Library ▾ Student Feedback Module Tools ▾

+ New Unit ⚙️ ☐ Hidden Add Existing Create New ...

Search titles, descriptions 🔍

Week/Topic 1

Digital media forms the backbone of modern communication, encompassing everything from social media platforms and news websites to streaming services and digital art. At its core, digital media is distinguished by its ability to be created, shared, and consumed in a variety of formats across interconnected devices. Unlike traditional media, which is often linear and passive, digital media enables interactivity, personalization, and immediate feedback, fostering a dynamic relationship between creators and audiences. Understanding its foundations requires exploring how digital technologies have transformed not just the way information is disseminated but also how it is shaped by and shapes societal values, cultural norms, and power structures.

A key aspect of digital media's foundation lies in the algorithms that govern its operation. Algorithms determine what content is surfaced, shared, and prioritized, often influencing public opinion and individual behavior. While these algorithms promise efficiency and personalization, they can also introduce biases, amplify echo chambers, and commodify user data. Similarly, the rise of digital literacy highlights the importance of equipping individuals with the skills to critically evaluate online information and understand its ethical and social implications. By delving into these foundational aspects, we can better appreciate both the potential and the pitfalls of the digital media landscape.

- Welcome
- Assessment Information
- ▼ Week/Topic 1
- Lecture slides
- 📄 Ethics and Future Directions
- ▶ Recorded Lectures
- ▶ Supplimentary Reading