

VLE Baseline Standards

The University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) is committed to providing students with opportunities for e-learning via the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE); this includes the provision of information about programmes and modules, learning materials and activities for learning. This threshold standard articulates a baseline set of requirements that all programmes/modules must have in terms of a VLE presence. The terms ‘threshold’ and ‘baseline’ are used to inspire teaching staff to go beyond a minimum standard. More extensive and innovative use of the University’s VLE to support learning and teaching is encouraged.

The VLE Baseline Standard has the following aims:

1. To facilitate and encourage a well-considered approach to the use of the VLE across the University and a consistent experience for students.
2. To support and/or directly underpin taught student e-learning activities.
3. To provide clear guidance to academic and administrative staff concerning the provision of resources and the information to be made available via the VLE.
4. To provide a platform on which to further enhance e-learning activities.

The type and extent of use of the VLE differs for campus-based programmes compared with online and blended programmes. Campus-based programmes tend to use the VLE as a support/enhancement mechanism in addition to scheduled contact time offline. Online programmes conduct most, if not all, of the learning, teaching and/or assessment activities online. Blended programmes, where a defined proportion of teaching, learning or assessment is delivered online, include intentional and structured online delivery that students rely on for core learning. The Standard, therefore, provides differentiated baselines (based on a framework implemented at University College London):

- Standard Baseline: for all modules that have a presence in Moodle (campus-based, online, and blended).
- Enhanced Baseline: for any modules that have an online only element (either full or partial, i.e. online or blended).
- Upper Baseline: for all modules where tutors want to add extra value to their content.

Every taught module at UWTSD must meet the *Standard Baseline* level, to provide a consistent experience for students.

Online programmes must also meet the *Enhanced Baseline* level, to ensure students studying online have the additional support and information they need. Given that blended delivery sits between campus-based and online delivery, it also requires adherence to both the *Standard* and *Enhanced Baseline* levels. However, many points under the *Enhanced Baseline* would also benefit campus-based courses, especially if there is a high online component.

Additionally, the *Upper Baseline* provides further enhancements and best practices that are optional to all delivery modes but provide an aspirational direction of travel.

The baselines are split into nine categories, with a description for each of what is needed to meet the requirements.

1. Programme pages
2. Structure and navigation
3. Orientation
4. Communication and student participation
5. Assessment
6. Resources
7. Cross-platform compatibility
8. Accessibility
9. Copyright and intellectual property

All taught programmes must have a VLE presence, comprising the following:

- 1 A programme page, containing general information relating to the programme and any relevant Institute-specific information.
- 2 A module page for each of a programme's taught modules.

Institutes will conduct an annual VLE audit, using a sampling approach, and will report specific outcomes to Institute Boards as part of the annual programme review (APR) process. Institute Representatives will report the overall results of the audit to Student Experience Committee (SEC).

	STANDARD BASELINE FOR PROGRAMME PAGES (Mandatory for all programmes that have a presence in Moodle – campus- based, online and blended)	ENHANCED BASELINE FOR PROGRAMME PAGES (Mandatory for any programmes that have an online only element – online and blended; optional enhancements for campus-based programmes)	UPPER BASELINE FOR PROGRAMME PAGES (Optional enhancements for all programmes – campus-based, online and blended)
1. Programme pages	To avoid duplication of information across modules, this page should be used for information that is common to the whole programme, e.g. news/notifications. 1.1. Provide the Programme of Study Handbook (or a hyperlink to it). This will provide an introduction to the programme, its structure, and the Module Specifications that contain the aims and learning outcomes for the modules (among other things, such as Institute-related information). 1.2. Provide an assessment schedule of dates for submission of assessments.	1.3. Provide an introduction to the programme, including resources required and who students should contact if they experience IT/access problems and/or wish to access student support/services.	1.4. Supply guidance relating to factors that influence successful online study. 1.5. Provide a video that introduces the programme.

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2. Structure and navigation	Consider how students will navigate through the module page(s) to find what they are looking for. 2.1. Resources and activities must be organised in a meaningful, clearly structured way to ease navigation within and from the module landing page (the first page that students see). This may be by theme/topic or according to the weekly (or other periodic) class schedule, for example. 2.2. Group related items together. Use text/headings that clearly identify content. For instance, key sections might include: • Learning and teaching materials • Module information • Contact information • Reading list (as per the Reading List Policy) • Assessment information. 2.3. Don't overload the module landing page. Instead, organise	2.5. Provide a consistent layout and experience for students and staff. This may involve the agreement of a 'house style' at Institute level to suit the programme being delivered. 2.6. Provide clear guidance to students as to which formative and/or summative tasks and activities they are to complete, in which order, and with deadlines, where relevant. Adaptive release may be used to selectively display content as needed, i.e. 'hiding' tasks until students have had the opportunity to complete prerequisite tasks.	2.7. Use tools such as the 'Book' function within Moodle to organise large amounts of information.

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	content in tiles/sections to avoid the need for excessive scrolling. 2.4. Before the module commences, check the currency and availability of content. Remove or hide all unused sections to avoid folders with no content (or worse, outdated content). Check that all web links are live; fix or remove broken links.		
3. Orientation	3.1. Introduce the module's VLE page, and its relationship with the offline activities of the module. 3.2. Provide a Learning and Teaching Scheme/Schedule of Work. 3.3. Explain the expectation for students' use of the page, e.g. participation in discussion groups, accessing learning materials, which activities are compulsory, and which are optional.	3.4. Send a welcome email message to students before/at the start of the module. 3.5. Provide an opportunity for students to 'meet' each other in the virtual environment. 3.6. For each formative or summative activity, provide clear guidance of what the student is expected to do. 3.7. Outline the mechanisms for student support for the module both online and offline.	

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4. Communication and student participation	4.1. Provide staff contact details: name, position, telephone, email, location. Specify online or offline ‘office hours or drop-in hours (as appropriate) and/or guidance on how soon students can expect a reply. 4.2. Explain how students and staff will communicate. For example, students should be encouraged to post general or frequently asked questions to a forum as some questions may be as easily answered by peers, and all can benefit. Conversely, email might be used for personal issues. 4.3. Use the Announcements forum for announcements / information on any changes / updates of which students need to be aware (supported by an automatic email). This is a one-way channel - students can't post a reply or send an email response to the cohort.	4.8. Activities should be designed to require students to interact with online activities to maintain student motivation and engage them actively in the learning process. This may involve such activities as online self-assessments, contributing to discussions, and completing interactive scenarios. 4.9. Provide clear mechanisms for collaboration on a range of tasks and/or assessments and the sharing of resources either individually or collaboratively (peer to peer) using online tools such as wikis, glossaries, databases and discussion forums. 4.10. A general Q&A forum, in which tutors and/or students can comment, pose and answer questions, should be provided.	4.11. Monitor student participation in expected activities such as online fora and send reminders to those who have yet to contribute to activities or assessments. 4.12. Provide a photograph of the staff member, either as a profile photo or on the module page. 4.13. Use ‘calendar’ functionality to communicate important dates to students. 4.14. Use an appointments tool, such as ‘Scheduler’ in Moodle, to enable students to book appointments with the module tutor(s). 4.15. Provide an out-of-office response to student emails from Moodle, to manage expectations regarding response times. This can be a separate function from the main email system – contact the Information Technology &

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	4.4. Students must have the opportunity to evaluate the module anonymously, including its online elements, e.g. via the supplied Module Evaluation Questionnaire block. 4.5. Students should be made aware that they are expected to adhere to the Student Code of Conduct, which promotes respectful and considerate online interactions, fostering a positive and inclusive learning community for all. 4.6. Facilitate online discussions, assessments, and feedback through the VLE to enhance the learning experience;' and 'Monitor and moderate online discussions and forums to maintain a respectful and inclusive learning environment. A moderated learning forum(s) for discussions related to specific course activities should be implemented.		Systems department for set-up advice. 4.16. Create and award 'digital badges' for achievements and completion of activities. 4.17. Use the 'conditional completion' functionality to automatically mark an activity as complete when a student has met certain conditions, e.g. posted three times in a forum. 4.18. Use the 'adaptive release' method (see 2.6) in conjunction with 'conditional completion' to create a 'gamified' experience – the student has to 'unlock' content by completing certain tasks.

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5. Assessment	5.1. Provide details of the assessment regime, e.g. number of assessment components, weighting per component, method of assessment, deadlines for submission, and feedback. This may be in the form of a Module Handbook or GA36. 5.2. For each assessment, post the assessment specification, including the tasks, guidance, and marking criteria. This may be part of a Module Handbook. 5.3. Give clear instruction as to how students are to submit their coursework (e.g. hard copy or electronic) and where. 5.4. For coursework that is to be submitted electronically, ensure that students are aware of deadlines relating to draft and final submissions to Turnitin. 5.5. Where relevant, provide example exam rubrics and	5.6. Assignments should be marked electronically, using Turnitin's Feedback Studio, or Moodle's inbuilt 'Assignment' activity, for instance.	5.7. Provide formative assessment tasks, such as quizzes, drag and drop tasks, or interactive videos. 5.8. Provide assessment feedback using a range of media, e.g. audio / video. Turnitin and Panopto for written and video assessment both provide multimedia feedback options.

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	sample exam papers (or a link to them).		
6. Resources	6.1. Teaching materials that exist in a suitable digital format should be uploaded to the VLE e.g. presentation slides used in lectures, activities/handouts used in tutorials. Staff's personal teaching notes and lesson plans are not required. 6.2. Online Resource Lists relating to any essential or background readings for the module should be available (or a link to them). This may include a range of sources such as books, journals, websites, etc. (See section 9 regarding copyright and IP). 6.3. Module pages must comply with the lecture recording policy as outlined in the Academic Quality Handbook	6.4. A range of learning activities and media should be used, including, for example, embedded video and audio, quizzes, scenario-based challenges, case studies, blogs, participation in group discussion, live chat sessions, lecture capture. 6.5. Provide links to external online resources.	6.6. Liaise with the Learning Design team to create purpose built, online teaching content.
7. Cross-platform compatibility	7.1. Use standard formats, like PDF for text-based documents (e.g. PowerPoints), JPG for images, and MP3 for audio, as they can		7.3. Compress large files to minimise the file size and aid those students viewing them on mobile devices. The file size

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	be accessed on a variety of devices. Word documents should be used only for electronically editable documents such as templates, worksheets or coversheets. 7.2. If you choose to use videos, use common delivery platforms like YouTube, Panopto or Clipchamp for video clips. Avoid formats that require specialist software or plug-ins (e.g. Flash) unless they are required for the subject of study, as they are not supported by all devices.		and type should be displayed alongside the filename, e.g. Starbucks Marketing Campaign 34MB
8. Accessibility	8.1. Comply with the Equality Act 2010 and The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018. 8.2. When creating or uploading content to the VLE: • Use a consistent and accessible text style in Moodle		

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	• Use font size 12 as a minimum • Use an in-built font and use it consistently within a module • Use the in-built font styles (Paragraph, Heading 1, Heading 2 etc.) to create text hierarchy rather than manually adjusting font sizes • Use bold for emphasis rather than capitals or underlining text 8.3. Use the in-built Moodle Accessibility checker (Brickfield Accessibility Starter Toolkit) to assess and modify content to comply with the WCAG 2.2 AA accessibility standard. 8.4. Consider providing content in different formats, where possible and suitable. For example, a diagram might complement text to support understanding.		

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	8.5. For guidance on how to create accessible content, refer to the mandatory e-learning 2. Contact the Learning Support Manager (LSM) for your Institute for further guidance. 8.6. Adhere to the Welsh Language standards when designing course content on the VLE for courses that offer delivery through the medium of Welsh. Further advice and support can be provided by the Welsh Language Team: welshlanguage@uwtsd.ac.uk		
9. Copyright and intellectual property	9.1. Comply with copyright and intellectual property legislation and the appropriate University policies. 9.2. If in doubt: consult with the Library and Learning Resources Service regarding any copyright queries to ensure compliance with various licences held by the University from bodies such as Copyright Licensing Agency;		

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	• refer to information on Library webpages regarding the scanning of course materials by designated person i.e. library staff for inclusion on VLE e.g. chapter of a book; • provide links out to useful websites rather than copying text directly into a module; • use open-source or copyright-cleared images. A useful starting point is Creative Commons, see https://creativecommons.org/.		