**UCD Virtual Learning Environment (VLE): Standards Policy**

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**Introduction**

It is timely to enhance our current approaches to curriculum delivery, personalised learning and student support. Faculty have developed new skills, Educational Technologists have supported the design of new and innovative approaches in blended and online contexts and students now have a range of opportunities to support and enhance their own learning. Guidelines for using the VLE, Brightspace, were approved by the Academic Council Executive Committee in 2021 and it is timely now to consider the enhancement of standards for our virtual learning environment. This policy is developed with a view to supporting Faculty, School Heads of Teaching and Learning, Educational Technologists and all staff who support teaching and learning to make decisions about the appropriate use of the VLE, based on their own pedagogical requirements and contexts.

Every academic module in UCD, whether face-to-face, blended or online **should be** provided for in Brightspace. In so doing, each 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 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, EDI and Universal Design compliant.

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 four Units are included in all academic modules under *Learning Materials*; 1- Welcome, 2 - Introduction, 3 – Learning,  4 - Assessment.

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.

## 1 - Welcome Unit

The purpose of the Welcome Unit is to engage the learner with any necessary information prior to undertaking the module. This serves as a point of orientation and socialisation for the student.

The Welcome Unit should include, at a minimum:
- A summary or brief description of the module
- An introduction to faculty and the wider teaching team
- Contact information/hours for the teaching team

Note: This information could be also presented using the [Welcome Widget.](#)

## 2 - Introduction Unit

The purpose of the Introduction Unit is to provide an overview or introduction to the module, setting out expectations as to how the module will be delivered, and what is to be expected of the student.

The Introduction Unit should include, at a minimum:
- 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
- An overview of the assessment strategy
- The teaching and learning strategy e.g. individual and group work, reflective learning, case-based learning, critical writing, student presentations, guest speakers etc

## 3 - Learning Units

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

The purpose of Learning Units is [to present learning content and associated activities to students in a clear and easy to follow manner](#).

Learning Units should:

- Adhere to a clear, consistent and easy to follow naming convention, which should be implemented throughout. 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 i.e. where possible keep activities and content that relate to the same theme / topic / week together in a learning unit.
  *e.g Wk1 Lecture Notes, Wk1 Discussion Board, Wk 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 sub-units (folders) to access the resource/content.

## 4 - Assessment 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 Unit should include:

- An overview of assessment types in use on the module (referencing the Assessment Strategy as per the Introduction Unit)
- Independent links to all credit-based assessment activities
- Feedback approach e.g., clear expectations as to how, when and where to receive feedback on assessed work, as per academic regulations

## 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.
- Content can be inputted as "Create a File', where it is possible to copy and paste from a source file or using an existing template. This helps considerably with accessibility of the module for students.
- 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.
- Use of originality checker for assignments