VLE Baseline Standard

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 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. The Standard therefore, provides differentiated baselines (based on a framework implemented at University College London):

- Standard Baseline: mandatory requirements for all campus-based and online modules.
- Enhanced Baseline: mandatory requirements for all online modules, which are optional enhancements for campus-based modules.
- Upper Baseline: enhancements/best practices that are optional for campus-based and online modules.

Every taught module at UWTSD should meet the *Standard Baseline* level, in order to provide a consistent experience for students. Online courses should also meet the *Enhanced Baseline* level, to ensure students studying online have the additional support and information they need. However, many points under the Enhanced Baseline would also benefit campus-based courses, especially if there is a high online component. In addition, the *Upper Baseline* provides further enhancements and best practices that are optional to both campus-based and online programmes 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. Faculty/School page programme-related
2. Structure
3. Orientation
4. Communication
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 faculty- or school-level page, containing general information relating to the School and programme.
2. A module page for each of a programme's taught modules.

Schools will conduct an annual VLE audit, using a sampling approach, and will report the outcomes to Faculty Board. Faculty Representatives will report the outcomes to AQSC,

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1. Faculty-/ School-related	To avoid duplication of information across modules this page should be used for information that is common to the whole Faculty or School or to particular programmes or groups, 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). 1.2. Provide the Programme Timetable (or a hyperlink to it). 1.3. Provide an assessment schedule of dates for submission of assessments.	1.5 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.	1.6 Supply guidance relating to factors that influence successful online study. 1.7 Provide a video that introduces the School.

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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 should 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 labels/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, place the content on another page(s) and provide a hyperlink that allows students to drill down to the content. Avoid the need for	2.5 Provide a consistent layout and experience for students and staff. This may involve the agreement of a 'house style' at Faculty, School or programme 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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	excessive scrolling to find sections/content. 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.	
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.	4.5. Activities should be designed to require students to interact with online activities in order to maintain student motivation and engage them actively in the learning process. This may involve such activities as online self-assessments, contributing to	4.9. Monitor student participation in expected activities such as online fora and send reminders to those who have yet to contribute to activities or assessments. 4.10. Provide a photograph of the staff member, either as a profile photo or on the module page.

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	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 news 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. 4.4. Students must have the opportunity to evaluate the module anonymously, including its online elements, e.g. via an end-of-module questionnaire.	discussions and completing interactive scenarios. 4.6. 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). 4.7. A general Q&A forum, in which tutors and/or students can comment, pose and answer questions, should be provided. 4.8. A moderated learning forum(s) for discussions related to specific course activities should be implemented.	4.11. Use 'calendar' functionality to communicate important dates to students. 4.12. Use an appointments tool, such as 'Scheduler' in Moodle, to enable students to book appointments with the module tutor(s). 4.13. 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 & Systems department for set-up advice. 4.14. Create and award 'digital badges' for achievements and completion of particular activities. 4.15. 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. 4.16. Use the 'adaptive release' method (see 2.6) in conjunction with 'conditional completion' to create a 'gamified' experience– the student has to 'unlock'

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			content by completing certain tasks.
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. 5.2. Where assessment is via coursework, 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 sample exam papers (or a link to them).	5.6. Assignments should be marked electronically, using GradeMark, for instance.	5.7. Provide formative assessment tasks. 5.8. Provide assessment feedback using a range of media, e.g. audio / video.
6. Resources	6.1. Teaching materials that exist in a suitable digital format should be uploaded to the VLE e.g.	6.3. A range of learning activities and media should be used, including, for example, embedded video	

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	presentation slides used in lectures, activities/handouts used in tutorials. Staff's personal teaching notes and lesson plans are not required. 6.2. Reading 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).	and voice casts, RSS feeds, quizzes, scenario based challenges, case studies, blogs, participation in group discussion, live chat sessions, lecture capture. 6.4. Provide links to external online resources.	
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 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. Use common delivery platforms like YouTube 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.		7.3. Compress large files to minimise the file size and aid those students viewing them on mobile devices. The file size and type should be displayed alongside the filename, e.g. Starbucks Marketing Campaign 34MB video

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8. Accessibility	8.1. Comply with the Disability Discrimination Act, e.g. ensure fonts are large enough to read and coloured text has high contrast against backgrounds. For specialist advice, contact Student Services.		8.2. Provide alternative accessibility media formats e.g. screen reader capability, transcripts, audio files, font size variation capability and audio-feedback. 8.3. Provide where possible alternative media formats for all students for access by different devices – rtf files, tablet capability, eBooks.
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 in order to ensure compliance with various licences held by the University from bodies such as Copyright Licensing Agency; • 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;		

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	• 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/.		