

VLE Baseline Plus

Audience: This VLE Baseline Plus checklist is designed for TU Dublin lecturers who have already implemented much of the guidance in the Baseline checklist.

The aim of this resource is to help you:

- Review your Brightspace (or other VLE) module and see where you can make structural or practice changes which will benefit your students
- This checklist builds on the TU Dublin VLE Baseline Checklist. It contains an additional set of practical recommendations to guide the further development of modules in TU Dublin's virtual learning environment (VLE) in ways that encourage student engagement and enhance the learning experience.

Date last reviewed: August 2024

Original draft by Dr. Jen Harvey, Dr. Ana Schalk, Dr. Frances Boylan

1. Enhance the Design and Organization of your Content – Align instructional content and learning activities with your module learning outcomes, emphasizing pedagogy over technology.	Done?
1.1 Establish learners’ ‘starting points’ – assess learners’ existing knowledge, skills, and abilities and adapt your syllabus to address identified gaps.	
1.2 Consider Learner pathways - design a coherent conceptual framework outlining the learner pathway through your module. This will assist you in structuring your module and will help learners to understand the relationships that exist between module learning outcomes and course components.	
1.3 Show the application of theory to practice – increase engagement by referencing and linking to practical examples that illuminate theoretical concepts. Use the tools provided by the VLE to integrate complementary content in a range of media.	
1.4 Scaffold student learning through conditional release – structure your module content along distinct pathways, making the release of module content and assessments contingent upon learner progress and choice.	
1.5 Balance workloads for learner and lecturer wellbeing - spread activities, assessments, and be explicit about the time and commitment required for each task, activity or content unit. Clearly indicate which are to be prioritized, and when.	
2. Build a Sense of Community Through Peer Interaction - nurture participation, interaction and ‘social presence’ within your online and blended learning communities.	Done?
2.1 Help students to get to know each other – the early use of online ice-breaking activities and no-stakes, collaborative learning tasks can foster a sense of belonging and connectedness within your classes. This is particularly important for first-year cohorts.	
2.2 Integrate structured group-based activities – offer opportunities for peer engagement, peer review, and collaborative learning both in your live classes and in the form of asynchronous activities (e.g. breakout rooms, peer evaluation, and group discussions).	
2.3 Encourage students to be present - create formal and informal opportunities for students to engage with one another as part of an online community by responding to one another’s questions and engaging in discussion.	
3. Create a Sense of Lecturer Presence in the Module – become an actively engaged and visible presence within your online module through regular synchronous and asynchronous communication	Done?
3.1 Regularly ‘meet’ your students online - provide opportunities for students to engage with you directly in the online setting outside of your scheduled virtual classroom sessions. These encounters can be synchronous or asynchronous and might include question-and-answer sessions, discussion moderation, or ‘virtual office hours’.	
3.2 Leverage the VLE’s tools for regular, personalized communication – keep your module ‘fresh’ by offering regular class updates and use the VLE’s built-in tools to personalize module announcements and automated, conditionally released emails. Participate in discussion fora as much as is practicable.	
3.3 Provide regular and effective feedback and feedforward - design low-stakes formative assessments for groups and individuals and - where appropriate - use rubrics and automatic, personalized feedback to reduce evaluation workloads and timeframes.	

4. Encourage Student Engagement with Content and Assessments - use the tools available in the VLE to foster deeper engagement with content and offer a variety of assessment types	Done?
4.1 Make the most of your synchronous sessions – provide learners with opportunities to engage with content before, during and after a live session using tools such as discussion boards, comment walls, social media, surveys, quizzes, and virtual classroom chat. This can encourage students to attend, to participate, and to engage on a deeper level with module content.	
4.2 Make the most of your asynchronous activities – asynchronous activities, whether individual or group-based, can promote learner autonomy, build collaborative learning abilities, and foster deeper understanding as students apply theory to practice.	
4.3 Incorporate a balance of assessment for learning, of learning, and as learning – use a variety of assessment activities that not only measure formal and informal learning achievements but contribute to students’ reflection, self-assessment and development as independent learners. Where possible, seek student input into the design of assessments and assessment criteria, encourage the development or reflective learning ePortfolios, and reward student engagement and achievement through the use of digital badges and awards.	
4.4 Design authentic assessments - make use of assessments that focus on learners’ application of knowledge and skills in the performance of exemplary tasks.	
5. Personalize the Student Learning Experience to Promote Student Success – create flexible and individualized routes through your online modules	Done?
5.1 Create personalized learning pathways and experiences – provide students with more authentic opportunities to enjoy a personalized learning experience. Possible approaches include asynchronous activities that empower students to control the pace, place and time at which they learn; using conditional release of content and activities to structure learner progress within your module; giving students choice over their assessments and individual and group projects, permitting them to negotiate the mode and format in which they work is presented.	
5.2 Monitor student progress and provide regular updates – make use of your VLE’s built-in analytics to monitor student progress and engagement and send personalized communications to individual learners where intervention or encouragement is required.	
5.3 Encourage students to reflect on their progress – use student action plans, learning contracts, reflection prompts, self-assessments, and completion tracking to foster self-regulation in your learners and to invite them to reflect on what they have learned and what they still need to learn.	
5.4 Encourage students to expand their personal and professional learning support networks – build in opportunities for students to communicate and collaborate with external and multidisciplinary communities beyond their module and programme.	
6. Promote and Embed sustainable Practice and Culture - utilize the VLE to pursue education for human, social and environmental sustainability	Done?
6.1 Leverage the VLE to reduce the ecological footprint of your module – consider the environmental impacts of your approach to online teaching and incorporate a sustainability evaluation into the planning and design stage of your modules. Examples of practical steps you can take to enhance sustainability include going paperless; building, sharing, and utilizing open educational resources (OERs), and offering more flexible delivery for equity and inclusivity.	
6.2 Offer opportunities for the development of 21st century transversal skills - provide meaningful and authentic opportunities for students to develop competencies that will assist them in responding to the complex demands of living, working, and learning in the 21st century.	

6.3 Evaluate and iterate your own modules - evaluate, reflect upon and incrementally modify the design of your module, as appropriate, engaging with different professional development opportunities to inform your practice, trying new things that can enhance the quality of your students' learning experience.	
6.4 Extend the boundaries of your module – where possible, offer opportunities for learners to establish connections with – and learn from – their peers, the wider disciplinary community, and broader formal and informal networks.	