



Virtual Learning Environment Policy & Procedure

Policy no:	4.7
Version no. & date:	V0.1
Next review due:	June 2023
Responsible Committee:	SMT
Approved by & date:	AcB 26 Jun 2020
Linked policies:	Teaching Learning and Assessment Strategy Internet Code of Practice Admissions Policy Employee Handbook Student Handbook Programme Handbook Staff Development Policy (EH)
Audience:	Website, Staff Induction, Student Induction

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1 Introduction

This policy is designed for all staff and students at the College who use or will be required to use the OBC Virtual Learning Environment or Moodle.

2 Scope

Currently the VLE is used for delivering the following programmes:

- OBC Foundation
- BTEC HNC and HND delivered by OBC or in partnership with USP College
- Business Innovation and Management Top-up in partnership with UCA

Students studying on Bucks New University (BNU) courses use the BNU Blackboard and those studying on University of West London (UWL) courses use the UWL Blackboard.

3 Purpose

- Ensure that all relevant staff can interact with the correct pages on the VLE, access and upload appropriate materials and activities to support their teaching and assessment of students
- Ensure that all relevant students interact with the correct pages on the VLE and access appropriate materials and activities to support their learning and assessments
- Ensure that the VLE tool to support student learning is appropriate, reliable, accessible, and secure
- Ensure that staff and students are provided with appropriate information and training to support their use of the VLE.

4 VLE Strategy

A VLE can have too much information so that students do not feel that they need to attend lectures. Alternatively, it can have too little which means that it is of little or no use. The OBC strategy is to provide just the right amount of information so that students are given 24/7 access to the essential tools and guidance they need to attend classes, go over materials that were used in classes and complete their assessments. The VLE can also provide additional material that will broaden students' understanding of the subjects they are studying.

The College uses its VLE for the following essential purposes:

- To provide key induction materials for students at the beginning of each term
- To provide a course outline with annual calendar showing term dates
- To provide important updates to the College's policies or procedures
- To provide module booklets with unit content and/or assignment briefs and a scheme of work
- To provide students with Turnitin assignment links, where they can submit formative and summative assessments multiple times before the deadline
- To provide students with lectures slides, notes and links to videos for each lesson taught
- For teachers to mark and give feedback to students on assignment submissions

5 VLE Oversight

Overall responsibility for use of the VLE and this policy relating to the use of the VLE rests with the Academic Board which reports to the Board of Governors (BoG). Programme leaders, who sit on Academic Board, monitor detailed input on the VLE.

6 Platform Choice

Moodle is the standard platform for VLE within the College where there are no other platforms being used in partnership with other organisations. However, when using other platforms students should receive an equivalent level of access and quality of learning resources to those described in this policy.

Where it is proposed to use an alternative platform, approval must first be secured from the Academic Board (AcB). Approval for an alternative platform will normally be given only where there are strong pedagogic reasons for its use.

The standard platform for the VLE within the College as well as the content of the VLE will be reviewed once each term by the Quality and Enhancement Committee (QEC), which is the deliberative arm of the Academic Board (AcB), to ensure that the platform and its contents directly meet the needs of students and staff.

7 Availability and Access

Where appropriate, each taught course in the relevant programmes should have an associated VLE instance or link each term. The naming of VLE instances must follow the format of:

“Programme name, abbreviated name” for programme instances, and “Module name, abbreviated name” for module instances; using the same names and abbreviations as allocated by the Head of

Academics when programmes are approved.

College students should have access to a VLE (Moodle or Blackboard) instance for all taught modules on which they are currently registered. Additionally:

- Students should continue to have access to the Moodle or Blackboard instance for any module which they are required to repeat in full or in part; departments should take steps to provide such access through either a dedicated version of the associated VLE instance or by enrolling such students on the next live iteration of the module, as appropriate.
- Students cannot be given access to Moodle or Blackboard instances associated with future modules – accordingly, alternative approaches should be used where access to future materials is necessary, such as making fuller module descriptions, reading lists, etc. available through programme-wide Moodle or Blackboard instances for optional module selection.
- Some programmes may require that students have access to Moodle or Blackboard instances associated with previously completed modules (for reference to, or revision of, key topics or skills); programme or module leaders should provide such access through a dedicated or archived (see section 10) version of the associated Moodle or Blackboard instance.
- OBC IT Services will check the compatibility of VLE functions with all core University supported web browsers, and as far as possible other popular web browsers known to be used by the majority of students and staff. As far as possible, core VLE functions will be available to all users regardless of browser type, computing platform or location.
- The preferred VLE platform will adhere adequately to current accessibility guidelines, providing an equivalent experience to all students on our programmes; learning and teaching content within individual VLE instances must also meet current accessibility guidelines.

8 Registration of Student User

The registration of student users for VLE must be carried out by Academic Support Officers overseen by Programme Leaders after induction and before classes begin. Normally registration onto the VLE is carried out during induction week. Ad hoc registrations of student users, for example, for a student who has joined the course late, must also be carried out by Academic Support Officers overseen by Programme Leaders no longer than 24 hours after a student enrolls.

9 Registration of Staff Users

The VLE Academic Lead (see *Staff Roles* below) is responsible for the registration of staff users. In order to protect personal data, only staff with a direct learning, teaching or support role in the programme/module should be given access to the associated VLE instance. Senior academic management or other approved staff receive reasonable access in order to study and improve systems.

10 Registration of Guest Users

Sections of VLE instances can be opened to “guests”. Any person, worldwide, is then able to connect to that instance as a guest and gain access to any materials or data within it. Opening VLE instances in this way should therefore normally be avoided and, in particular, instances must not be opened to guests where this could compromise the security of any personal data held within, or open copyrighted materials (such as library resources) beyond their prescribed bounds.

There may be special “guest access” VLE instances which can be used for marketing or open access purposes: these would normally contain no personal or restricted-access material.

11 Staff Roles

There may be variations in how staff responsibilities in relation to use of the VLE is shared in practice. The following staff roles are defined for targeting training in the use of the VLE:

- **VLE Academic Lead (VAL)** is normally the Programme Leader but may also be the Head of Programme or Head of Academics. The VAL has overall responsibility for the content and quality of the programme/module and copyright compliance. The VAL also has overall responsibility for the registration of student and staff users and controlling access to materials.
- **Content Creator** is normally a Tutor and/or Assessor who adds or amends material within an allocated VLE instance, with devolved responsibility for the quality and copyright compliance of that material. The Tutor/Assessor is responsible for checking, moderating or supporting student contributions to the VLE instance they are allocated to including giving feedback on student work.
- **Internal Verifier** may also be given limited access to VLE instances in order to carry out internal verification of assessments

12 Design and Navigation Standards

To ensure a uniform standard of practice and quality in design and navigation of the VLE (Moodle), the following guidance be adhered to starting with each heading that should be used:

Course Induction Slides upload power-point slides used for induction

- **Course Outline** upload an outline of the course with all units and the academic calendar (obtain approved versions verified by the Head of Academics or Head of Programme).
- **Unit Description** upload all unit content including learning outcomes
- Under the Heading **Assignment Brief** followed by the unit number and title upload the verified module booklet with unit content, and/or assignment brief and scheme of work.
- **Policies and Procedures** regarding Learning, Teaching And Assessment including Induction Slides, Student Code of Conduct, Academic Malpractice, Non-Academic Malpractice, Academic Appeals, Assessments, Recognition or Prior Learning, Attendance and Complaints
- **Guidance Notes** (e.g., for online studying)
- **Formative Submission Deadline** followed by the deadline date create a Turnitin assessment link.
- **Summative Submission Deadline** followed by the deadline date create a Turnitin assessment link.
- Learning and teaching content should normally be organised in such a way as to aid student navigation – for example, content might be arranged chronologically with reference to the module/course calendar; by theme or topic; or by group activity – but other formats may be used as appropriate to the programme/module.
- Key contact information for academic, administrative and technical support should normally be provided under the overarching main navigation heading of **Help and Contacts**.
- Headings and subheadings should be clear and consistent.
- Downloadable files and other materials should be named in a way that is consistent and descriptive of their content and provided in a form which affords access by all students registered on the VLE instance.
- Folders and information (including announcements) which are out of date or not in use should be removed from the navigation structure or deleted altogether.
- Regular checks (at least once per academic year) should be made by the VAL of the currency of materials available through their VLE instances – this includes references in texts, links to online resources, etc.

- Prominent and appropriate links to key policies and procedures as well as academic information resources should be included in any programme or module VLE instances. Access to resources and student welfare should be updated each term.
- Major changes to the design and/or navigation of a live VLE instance should not normally be made part-way through a module or programme; where this is unavoidable, users should be:
 - Given as much notice as possible
 - Told what is changing and when
 - Given support in using the new design or navigation features
 - Told who to contact should they need assistance

13 Use of Third-Party Learning Resources (including Reading Lists)

'Third party' learning resources is used here to mean learning resources which are not created by the University and are obtained or linked to from elsewhere such as eBooks, eJournals, external Websites etc.

To avoid copyright infringement, the VAL should ensure that when re-using third party materials as part of their course content, open-source materials are used where possible. Some non- open source third party materials (this includes materials embedded within hand-outs/slideshows) can be made available under the College license (e.g., CLA) or by obtaining permission from the copyright owner. Extracts from most printed books and journals can be scanned to include in the VLE under the terms of a license with the Copyright Licensing Agency.

Due to licensing restrictions *links* to third party resources should be used wherever possible, as opposed to embedding actual materials (e.g., PDFs, word documents).

Where students are provided with a reading list, use of the College's available resources is strongly encouraged.

14 Assessment and Feedback Practices

The VAL should ensure that the following guidance on assessment and feedback practices is adhered to:

- All assessment and feedback practices within the VLE must be consistent with the College Teaching Learning and Assessment Policy.
- Where assessed work is submitted through the VLE, feedback should be provided within two weeks of the deadline for internal verification which is hidden from students and after the third week post-deadline for the student. Feedback should either be on that work or should be signposted through that VLE instance.

15 Archiving

When a module completes for a particular cohort, the VLE instance will remain available to all students and staff that originally had access until all students have completed the full programme. If a student interrupts their studies, they will retain access for 6 months.

16 Training and Support for Staff

The VAL will provide:

- Initial staff training on the use of the VLE during staff induction. Further follow-up training on VLE use for individuals and groups of staff will be provided ad hoc as required throughout the academic year.
- Initial training for all students on the use of the VLE during their induction. Tutors will provide ongoing training and support for individuals and groups of students as required.

17 Quality Assurance

- Students and staff end of module/course evaluation questionnaires should explicitly address the quality of experience relating to the use of the VLE.
- The College Annual Monitoring Review should also explicitly address the use of the VLE and associated issues relating to its design and contribution to the overall learning experience.

18 Monitoring

Two levels of monitoring are conducted in relation to the VLE:

- Service-level monitoring, relating to the performance of the VLE service as a whole. Such monitoring is carried out by IT services.
- Instance-level monitoring, relating to student and staff activity on individual VLE instances.

19 Innovative Use of the VLE

It is recognised that VLEs have a role to play in the development of innovative teaching practice.

However, this must not be done in such a way that the quality of the student experience could be put at risk. The VAL and other Content Creators should note that:

New learning tools should not normally be tested on students within a live VLE instance, except when agreed with the students in advance and not adversely affecting any learning outcomes or assessment for those students

- In-built learning tools within the VLE should be preferred to externally available third-party tools, where features and services are broadly similar
- When third party tools are used to extend the VLE environment beyond university hosted/supported services, this should be for strong pedagogic or administrative reasons.
- Additionally, student personal data must not be compromised or stored in third party hosted services (partners or awarding and accreditation bodies) except when approved by the Head of Academics.
- Where innovative practice has been successful, this practice should be shared with colleagues across the institution during scheduled or ad hoc staff training and development sessions for individuals and groups.

20 Use of Virtual Learning Environments for Mass Communications

Departments should be consistent in the use of the VLE as a tool for mass communication and ensure that students are made aware at the start of the module where to look for new messages. Key announcements should be flagged and any outdated time-bound communications on the VLE should be removed from student view once no longer relevant.