UCL E-Learning Baseline: enhancing e-learning provision

A Quick Introduction

Students appreciate, and increasingly expect, consistent and well-considered use of online learning. This page sets out the **minimum** expectations, or baseline, for e-learning provision for all taught programmes and modules at UCL, with a focus on Moodle. The current policy relating to the E-Learning Baseline forms part of **Chapter 11 of the Academic Manual.**

Benefits

This Baseline addresses the increasingly integrated and sophisticated level of technology use at UCL and aims to ensure consistency and quality of the e-learning experience for all students across all modules. It offers a number of benefits:

- Helps articulate e-learning provision during the programme or module proposal and review process.

- Encourages consistency across modules when used at departmental, faculty or school level. This may be via templates for Moodle courses and content.

- Enables course teams to enhance the use of technology by offering suggestions on how to move beyond the baseline.

- Assists course teams and departments to review and quality assure their use of e-learning in a systematic way and identify gaps in provision.

- Provides a framework to monitor progress over time.

Baseline Navigation

Click on a section heading below.

1. Structure

2. Orientation

3. Communication

4. Assessment

5. Resources

6. Cross-platform compatibility

7. Accessibility

8. Legal

9. Student Active Participation

10. Quality Assurance

Document Coming Soon

The **online baseline** (on this page, below) has been updated for 2020 (scroll down for the full online baseline or click on a section title in the menu to the left). Printed and downloadable document versions are in progress.

Please direct queries, feedback and suggestions on using the Baseline and associated guidance to your school's Digital Education Advisor or via **digi-ed@ucl.ac.uk**.

A short URL to access this page is **http://bit.ly/UCLBaseline**.

Baseline, Baseline+ and Beyond

    1. *Baseline* (for campus-based courses[1]).
    2. *Baseline+* (in addition to the Baseline, for wholly online courses[2]).

For each of the ten categories, there is a description of what is needed to meet the requirements for both levels.

> **Definitions**
> [1] **Campus-based:** Students attend UCL and are taught via lectures, seminars, tutorials, practicals etc. They also learn through online resources, tools, forums and activities, and undertake independent study both on- and off-campus.
>
> [2] **Wholly online:** All teaching, learning and assessment activities are conducted online, usually asynchronously, but occasionally with scheduled synchronous online events, such as webinars. There is generally no attendance at UCL, although students have access to UCL libraries, facilities and learning support.
>
> Every taught module at UCL should meet the *Baseline*, in order to provide a consistent experience for students. Additionally, wholly online courses should also meet the *Baseline+* level, to ensure students studying online have the additional support and information they need. However, **many points under Baseline+ would also benefit campus-based courses**, especially if there is a high online component.

Alongside and Beyond the Baseline...

It is recognised that departments may wish to develop their own local customisations of this baseline, extending these recommendations.

Although the use of Moodle is strongly encouraged, the following guidelines may also be used with alternative systems. If other online learning tools are used, then the Moodle course associated with that programme/module /course should contain a link to this alternative or supplementary provision. There is no central support for any such systems external to UCL.

Further suggestions for how you might extend your use of e-learning tools are available at the bottom of each Baseline+ section.

UCL E-Learning Baseline 2020

	UCL Baseline	**UCL Baseline+**
	MUST for all (wholly online and campus-based). These items are expected for every taught module at UCL.	**MUST for wholly online / SHOULD for campus-based.** As well as the Baseline, these items are expected for all **wholly online courses**.
1. Structure **Structure your course clearly to help students**	☐ **1.1 Present activities and resources in a meaningful, clearly structured and sequenced way**. Typically each Moodle section represents a topic, which may cover one or more weeks of study.	☐ **1.4 Use a template** to provide a consistent layout and experience for students and staff. These provide a starting point to help staff meet this baseline, but may be modified to suit the course being delivered.

	UCL Baseline	**UCL Baseline+**
of activities, access information and easily understand the layout of unfamiliar courses.	within labels, books and pages to maintain consistency across sections and help students see where they are. • **Provide section overviews** - Provide a description in each section to introduce the topic or set of resources/activities. • **Clearly group and label items within a section** - Bring together common elements, use labels to provide common sub-headings across sections to help students navigate. • **Use Groups and Groupings** to give different views and information to specific groups of students, where needed. ☐ **1.2 Minimise cognitive load.** Avoid overloading the front page by placing content off the main page in Pages, Books, and Lessons, and by hiding unused items. If your front page is still long, consider using the Collapsed Topics format and ensure the navigation block is set to **Generate navigation for the following: Everything**. ☐ **1.3 Include navigation aids** - Suggested blocks to add to your Moodle course include Latest News, Recent Activity, Library Resources and Library Search. Further information on structure, navigation & clarity. 🔍 What this could look like...	**task to complete next.** This may include appropriate use of conditional release, so tasks are hidden until prerequisite tasks are completed, or until a certain date. Go beyond the baseline...
2. Orientation **Help learners orientate themselves, especially outlining how they are expected to learn and engage and how they may contact key staff members to get help when they need it.**	☐ **2.1 Include the Module Syllabus and Intended Learning Outcomes.** Include these directly in Moodle, or via a link to the module handbook or departmental website. ☐ **2.2 Explain participation requirements:** • Outline how students are expected to use Moodle in a **course usage statement**. • Identify which activities are **compulsory** and **optional**. • Explicitly signpost all **online** and **offline** activities and how they interrelate. • Provide an **indicator of effort** (such as	☐ **2.6 Provide an overview of the course** within the 'Course Summary' in the Moodle course settings. This should define who students contact to request access to the course. ☐ **2.7 Students are sent a welcome message before the start of the module.** Using the Moodle News forum ensures all students get an email. Include: • A short overview of the course; • A summary of expectations for online engagement. • How they can gain access to their course.

	UCL Baseline	UCL Baseline+
	- Explain how students are expected to use UCL and external e-learning tools. This PowerPoint Induction template provides a starting point. Wholly online courses might provide this information as a screen-cast video, with a voice over. - Link to **instructions** for any e-learning tools that students are expected to use. - Explain what **digital devices** and **software** students are expected to provide for themselves. ☐ **2.3 Display staff contact details** - Include name, position, telephone, email, location, drop-in hours, as appropriate. Further information on adding staff contact details to a Moodle Free Text block and updating Moodle profiles. ☐ **2.4 Moodle roles reflect the functions of staff** (e.g. Tutor, Course Administrator, Leader). ☐ **2.5 Ensure students are aware of all services and support available from the department and UCL** (this may be done at course, programme or department level)**.** In particular, link to: - The 'Digital Learning at UCL' Moodle course to familiarise students with Moodle (available from the Student Help menu); - The department website or a departmental 'Office' area on Moodle, which may be a good place to raise awareness without time-consuming duplication of links across modules. Further information on student support. 🔍 What this could look like...	posting to an introductions forum). Link to the 'UCL online learning orientation' Moodle course (for wholly online courses). The inclusion of audio or video is encouraged. ☐ **2.8 Outline the Intended Learning Outcomes for every activity and resource** in the description and provide a clear overview of what the student is expected to do. Further information on inducting and supporting students. Go beyond the baseline...
3. Communication **Ensure effective and consistent online communication with and between students.**	☐ **3.1 Provide a communication statement** , describing how students and staff will communicate for different purposes (e.g. using Moodle forums for coursework-related questions and email for personal matters). Include expected staff response times. ☐ **3.2 Use the News forum** as a one-way channel for important news such as key dates and events. Students receive an email (which they can't unsubscribe from),	☐ **3.5 Include a Q&A forum** for tutors and or students to pose questions and receive answers, which students can choose to unsubscribe from (if automatic subscription is selected). ☐ **3.6 Use learning forum(s)** for moderated discussions related to specific course activities. These might be discrete forums or topics within a forum. Automatic subscription then allows students to choose which

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	☐ **3.3 Make the purpose of every discussion forum clear**, including how students are expected to engage with it and how often staff will reply to posts (if at all). ☐ **3.4 Encourage staff and students to upload profile pictures** to help personalise the online environment and allow online discussions between collaborators to be more easily followed. Further information on communication. 🔍 What this could look like...	☐ **3.7 Track student participation** and send reminders to those who have yet to contribute to activities or submit assessments. Further information on communication. Go beyond the baseline...
4. Assessment **Clearly outline assessment requirements and link to tools and information to help avoid plagiarism.**	☐ **4.1 Provide an assessment outline** with a clear description of the module assessment, including schedule, criteria and submission details. This must align with the data stored in Portico and published on the Module Catalogue. Moodle should be used to amplify and support that information, perhaps to include sources of advice, etc. ☐ **4.2 Provide tools and information for avoiding plagiarism** - Link to the Plagiarism and Academic Writing course, where students can check their work for plagiarism independent of assessment submission points. Further information on assessment.	☐ **4.3 Provide online assignment submission points** - Students submit electronic documents online (Moodle / Turnitin Assignment) and provide clear guidance, e.g. by linking to either the 'Turnitin Assignment Guide' or 'Moodle Assignment Guide' as appropriate, so students understand how to submit and receive feedback on their work. Further information on electronic submissions. Go beyond the baseline...
5. Resources **Provide well labeled learning resources, using internal and external sources.**	☐ **5.1 Use descriptive titles for all items** and consider displaying the item's description on the course homepage, as this helps students understand the purpose of the activity or resource. ☐ **5.2 Provide learning resources** - Provide presentation slides, notes or handouts. See which file format to use when. UCL policy is to provide lecture materials 48 hours in advance. ☐ **5.3 Provide reading list(s)** – Provide a list of course readings, preferably using the UCL online reading list service, outlining which are compulsory and which are optional. ☐ **5.4 Check resources** - Regularly fix or remove broken hyperlinks (URLs) and	☐ **5.5 Link to external online resources** - (e.g. case studies, image libraries, multimedia, articles). See *Cross-platform compatibility & accessibility section below*. ☐ **5.6 Embed videos and other media** (such as animations, audio, virtual labs) from Lecturecast, Box of Broadcasts, YouTube, Vimeo, Khan Academy and other sources. ☐ **5.7 Include dynamic content from the wider web**, so students can better contextualise their learning and relate it to world events (if appropriate to the course), e.g. Twitter feeds, RSS news feeds. Further information on incorporating

	UCL Baseline	**UCL Baseline+**
	Further information on providing electronic resources.	Go beyond the baseline...
6. Cross-platform compatibility **Provide files in accessible formats to enable students to view them on mobile devices.**	☐ **6.1 Consider file formats**. When possible provide electronically-editable documents, but especially in the case of templates, worksheets or cover sheets. Avoid niche proprietary technologies such as Flash (swf files, iSpring etc.) as these do not load on all devices. Further information on which file types to use when.	☐ **6.2 Compress file sizes**, particularly to aid those students viewing them on mobile devices. In file settings, ensure the file size and type is displayed alongside the filename (e.g., 'Chemistry Lab Induction, 34MB video'). Further information on compressing images. Go beyond the baseline...
7. Accessibility **Provide accessible resources by following a few simple rules for the benefit of all students.**	☐ **7.1 Provide accessible learning resources*** by ensuring: - **Layout is clear, with good spacing**, including text that isn't cramped or dense. - **Navigation is consistent** (e.g., use departmental template). - **Fonts are sans serif and large enough** to read (minimum 11pt). - **Coloured text has high contrast** against backgrounds. Avoid red, green and pink text. - **Links are descriptive** (avoiding 'click here') and **open in the same window**. - Where there is heavy dependence on **images**, there is also a text description of the key learning points, for screen-reader users (e.g., alongside the image, as a caption, or as 'alternative text'). - **Resources provided** 48 hours in advance of lectures are in accessible formats. **UCL is currently updating its policies on creating accessible teaching materials, and more detailed guidance on requirements for making images and videos accessible will be available soon.* ☐ **7.2. Provide a brief, course-level accessibility statement containing any additional guidance and indicating who to contact (e.g., module leader, administrator) to request an alternative format for any resource.** ☐ **7.3 Use tools to check resources for**	The Accessibility baseline applies across all UCL modules. Go beyond the baseline...

	UCL Baseline	**UCL Baseline+**
	Accessibility Checker). **For further information and guidance see www.ucl.ac.uk/digital-accessibility**.	
8. Legal **Model good copyright practices. Communicate data protection issues and provide a private space for class interaction, so students have a safe environment to work in.**	☐ **8.1 Observe intellectual property and copyright legislation** by utilising the **ReadingLists@UCL service** for all reading; **linking out to useful websites** rather than copying text directly into a course, and where possible **using openly-licensed or copyright-cleared images**. ☐ **8.2 Avoid guest access (without a password) unless you are sure your material is copyright-cleared for open access** - Copyrighted/licensed material must only be supplied through a password protected system (such as Moodle), which complies with the terms and conditions of the publishers and of the Copyright Licensing Agency licence. ☐ **8.3 Communicate potential data protection issues when students are asked to use non-UCL systems**. An alternative must be provided if students refuse to register with an external service. Please contact the UCL Data Protection Officer for advice. ☐ **8.4 Ensure student-generated content is stored on a password protected system** (e.g. discussion boards, blogs, wikis, videos). Non-password protected sites should only be used if students are aware the material is publicly available, and are satisfied with the implications of this - e.g. their full names may appear alongside their work. Further information on legal considerations. 🔍 What this could look like...	☐ **8.5 Students learn about copyright** and can differentiate between what they are allowed to submit for their own private studies; what they can publish publicly in portfolios; and what can be used for personal or business use. Further information on copyright. Go beyond the baseline...
9. Student Active Participation **Encourage students to share their learning resources, interact with each other and participate in online activities.**	*Required for Baseline+ courses only.*	☐ **9.1 Students can share learning resources** either individually or collaboratively using online tools (such as wikis, glossaries, databases and discussion forums). ☐ **9.2 Students are required to interact with online activities**, such as online self-assessments, contributing to discussions and

	UCL Baseline	UCL Baseline+
		and engage them actively in the learning process. Go beyond the baseline...
10. Quality Assurance **Enable staff and students to evaluate online learning provision, so they can help to improve it year on year.**	☐ **10.1 Students can evaluate the module anonymously**, including its online elements, e.g. via an end-of-module questionnaire. ☐ **10.2 All stakeholders, including tutors, administrators and support staff, can contribute to the module/programme evaluation**, including its online elements, at regular intervals (e.g. yearly, or at major reviews). Further information on module and programme evaluation. 🔍 What this could look like...	☐ **10.3 Students can submit their module evaluations online**, e.g. via Moodle questionnaire or Opinio. ☐ **10.4 The module evaluation covers all aspects relevant to the use of technology for teaching and learning** in the module, including quality of all course components (e.g. activities, resources, administration, library provision), the e-learning experience (e.g. workload, involvement, restrictions), and the role of tutors and administrators (e.g. engagement, feedback, support). Further information on how to evaluate course components. Go beyond the baseline...

The original Baseline was developed after wide consultation on best UCL practice and was endorsed by Academic Committee in September 2011, and has been reviewed periodically. The current 2020 version reflects changes to the legal environment regarding accessibility, changes in Moodle, and some changes to wording to improve clarity.

How to use this document

- It is recommended you read through the relevant baseline as you develop your Moodle courses.
- You can also use it as a final checklist to ensure you have not missed out any crucial elements.
- If you are setting up a Moodle course based on a departmental template many of these items should be already addressed in the placeholders provided.
- Programme and module teams can request guidance and support in meeting the baseline from the Digital Education team in ISD.

Avoiding duplication

To avoid duplication of information across modules, it is recommended that common information is provided through departmental and/or programme level Moodle courses linked to from each module level course. Module-specific information can be linked to existing online information in module handbooks and/or on department websites.

Examples

- What could your campus-based course look like?
- What could a wholly online course look like?
- Example course usage statement.
- Example communication statement.

- Example of assessment guidance.
- Example student feedback information.
- Example Announcements forum description.

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practice   standards   baseline   minimum   course
design   best   checklist   requirements   good