

The Learning Edge ‘Baseline’

Introduction and context

The document was drafted in response to being asked to review and update the mandatory baseline/minimum threshold for Learning Edge, the University’s virtual learning environment (VLE).

The initial ‘baseline’ was introduced in 2008 as a strategy to provide a consistent student experience within each programme/department and to drive greater and more consistent use of the VLE following a recommendation to that effect made in the 2005 Institutional Review. Each faculty T&L committee agreed their own mandatory baseline but in the intervening years, these have been extended informally with improved VLE functionality (e.g. notifications to smartphone) and formally via policy decisions on electronic submission of coursework and typed feedback.

This attempt at updating the mandatory baseline/minimum threshold is based upon knowledge of current policy and practice. It is not intended to replace or limit existing good practice, and creative or innovative use of Learning Edge.

Redefining the ‘Baseline’

The revised ‘baseline’ document is attached (see **Appendix**). It is underpinned by the following principles:

- The Baseline is mandatory but Baseline+ and ++ are purely indicative - drawing upon existing good practice within the University and the wider HE sector.
- Course development in the VLE should be based upon sustainable academic practices – courses and teaching content in Blackboard should be developed and ‘owned’ by academic colleagues and not routinely delegated to others.
- By making no reference to pedagogy, it recognises that the pedagogic expert is the individual practitioner - but it is hoped that this document will spark conversations, innovations and multi-professional approaches with learning technologists, media developers and information specialists.
- The Baseline will continue to evolve in response to: feedback from staff and students, to strategic initiatives, and improvements or developments in software and systems.

The draft baseline document has been made available for feedback, including at one faculty TEL Steering Group. Academic colleagues who have provided feedback on it are comfortable with the underpinning principles and welcome the clarity it provides. They also suggest it has value as a self-audit tool – a simple way of mapping one’s module or programme VLE presence.

Next steps

For the University

- Consider mandating adoption of this Baseline to reflect the changing expectations of students

For Departments

To extend the distribution of this draft revision to all departments to:

- Discuss the draft Baseline and feedback amendments and revisions
- Use as a self-audit tool to capture current VLE presence in and across modules
- Consider where the Baseline can be extended through enhancements as suggested by Baseline+ and ++

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Appendix: Learning Edge Baseline and Baseline+

Categories	Baseline	Baseline+ (Indicative)	Baseline++ (Indicative)
Administration and Orientation	Programme and/or Module handbook (depending on area) (PDF format for mobile and operating system accessibility– see also Resources below) Link to timetables	Staff contact details including photograph, availability, contact information Use Calendar tool	Tutors talking head video introductions ¹
Structure and Navigation	Page items presented in a logical structure and sequence (usually chronological) Links checked to ensure still live. Broken links updated or removed	Faculty, Departmental or Programme templates used for consistency	Students guided through course by timed release of content
Communication	Announcements tool for urgent information updates e.g. room changes, cancellations (one way)	Q&A Discussion fora provided for 2-way communication. Purpose of fora and how to engage is provided	News panel displayed on VLE home page owned and managed by Faculty or Department. Provides local, non-urgent information ²
Resources	Presentation slides, notes and hand-outs uploaded to the eShare repository and linked to from VLE Cross-platform and mobile-accessible PDF format used unless documents need to be accessed for editing Support learners with additional requirements by making alternative resources i.e. transcripts for videos and use of colour contrast, font and text size in content ³	Compress files to minimise file size and aid students viewing on mobile devices. File size and type displayed alongside the filename e.g. Introduction to infection control 34MB PDF 68KB Teaching content in presentation software, e.g. PowerPoint enhanced by multimedia/ narration/ quiz functionality e.g. via iSpring plugin. Renders on any device (and mobile accessible) Use webcam or personal desktop capture software to highlight key concepts to students in any given topic	Bespoke content that requires specialist skills e.g. simulations, games, videos ⁵ , interactive resources Videos, links, images and texts display well on mobile devices including smartphones Activities specifically designed to harness mobile device features (e.g. camera, apps) to aid ‘anytime, anyplace learning’

¹ For example, could be self-produced by webcam or commissioned from Learning Services Media Development team

² Part of Learning Services LTD development activity, working with Faculties/Departments between now and next academic year. Will move to baseline+ then baseline once rolled out.

³ Accessible documents and presentations: <http://www.jisctechdis.ac.uk/techdis/resources/accessdocpres>

⁵ Role of LS Media Development –providers of video content that academics cannot be expected to build for themselves.

	Faculty or Departmental library resources available via a tab in VLE ⁴	Embed links to external online resources	
Assessment and Feedback	<p>Outline and dates for each assessment provided along with instructions, marking criteria, coversheets</p> <p>Assignment submission drop boxes (where appropriate). Students provided with clear instructions on how to submit electronic documents (Blackboard Assignment, Turnitin)</p> <p>Links to guides and where to go for help in the event of a problem submitting work</p>	<p>Student work marked in digital format (either online or offline)</p> <p>Student mark, return of work and feedback released via the use of the My Grades feature in the VLE</p>	Use of Blackboard tests/quizzes for formative assessment
Student Participation and Engagement		<p>Monitor student use of courses in the VLE using the Course Reports tool and Performance Dashboard</p> <p>Use the Retention Centre to track student engagement and identify those at risk</p> <p>Students share and/or build resources using online tools such as blogs, wikis</p> <p>Students encouraged to complete their Blackboard profiles to improve visibility within VLE</p> <p>Student end of module evaluations use Bristol Online Surveys or Blackboard survey tool to collect and collate feedback</p>	<p>Using the Retention Centre, identify students where lack of engagement with the VLE is giving a cause for concern</p> <p>Blackboard Collaborate used to deliver webinars or support to students</p> <p>Use of Collaborate or multimedia presentations to deliver a 'flipped classroom' approach</p> <p>Students encouraged to use the cloud social spaces within Blackboard for student-owned discussion and to link to peers/practitioners in other institutions both nationally and globally</p> <p>Use of polling tools or an anonymous discussion forum in the VLE to obtain snapshots of student opinion</p>
Personal/Professional Development Portfolio		Students use tools e.g. Campus Pack blogs and wikis for reflection on learning or practice and portfolio building.	Campus Pack portfolio assessed via the Blackboard Grade Centre

⁴ Managed by Learning Services