

VLE Standards Policy v1

The Open College

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Figure 1: A close up of a sign Description automatically generated

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1 Document Control

Document Version
1.0
Responsibility
Leadership Team
Review Cycle
Yearly
Next Review
This policy is due for review upon publication of updated QQI QA guidelines in 2025/2026

1.1 Record of Revisions

| Version | Date | Description | Approved by |
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| 1.0 | May 2025 | Initial Version | AB |

Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) Standards Policy
Purpose:

This policy establishes the institutional standards for the design, structure, and maintenance of all modules delivered through The Open College’s primary Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)- Moodle. Its purpose is to ensure that every online course and module provides learners with a consistent, accessible, navigable, and pedagogically sound learning experience, supporting the quality and integrity of our QQI-accredited programmes, whether delivered in a blended, or fully online mode.

This policy directly supports the College’s **Strategic Plan 2024-2026** and its commitment to learner-centred digital education. It aims to:

- Promote consistency and coherence in the digital learning experience across all programmes.
- Clarify institutional expectations for academics and support staff regarding the development, delivery, and maintenance of high-quality digital learning spaces. Enhance student confidence, orientation, and meaningful engagement with online course materials and activities.

- Embed accessibility as a key requirement across the VLE.

Scope:

This policy applies to all Moodle-hosted courses and modules that form part of any QQI-accredited programme offered by The Open College.

It applies to all academic staff involved in the design, development, delivery, or updating of Moodle course content, and to all Education Technology and Quality Assurance staff involved in VLE template development, review, or support.

Guiding Principles for VLE Module Design:

The design, structure, and maintenance of Moodle modules at The Open College are guided by the following core principles (these principles have been, in part, influenced by Mayer's 12 Principles of Multimedia Learning):

- **Consistency, Clarity and Coherence:** Modules will adhere to a standardised institutional layout and navigation model to ensure predictability, reduce cognitive load for learners, and facilitate ease of access to information, resources, and activities. Information regarding module objectives, learning outcomes, assessment details (as per the **Assessment Policy**), and tutor contact must be transparent and readily accessible.
- **Accessibility and Inclusivity:** All VLE modules and their content must be designed and maintained to meet recognised digital accessibility standards (e.g., WCAG 2.1) and embody the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), ensuring equitable access and participation for all learners.
- **Pedagogical Purpose and Engagement:** The VLE structure and content must be intentionally designed to support active learning, meaningful learner interaction (with content, peers, and tutors), and the achievement of stated module learning outcomes, aligning with the pedagogical approaches in the delivery framework and programme requirements.
- **Student-Centred Navigation:** The learner experience is paramount. Module design will prioritise intuitive navigation, logical organisation of content, and clear signposting to support learners in effectively managing their online studies.
- **Tutor Presence and Module Maintenance:** A clear and supportive tutor presence must be established and maintained within each module. Content must be regularly reviewed for accuracy, currency, and technical functionality to ensure a high-quality learning environment.

Minimum Standards for VLE Module Structure:

To ensure adherence to the guiding principles, all Moodle modules must incorporate a standardised set of core components and design features, based on an approved institutional Moodle course template. These standards include, but are not limited to:

- A clear module title, welcome message, and overview of module purpose, learning outcomes, and structure.
- Consistent weekly or thematic organisation of content.
- A dedicated and clearly labelled assessment section detailing all requirements, criteria, and submission protocols, consistent with the **Assessment Policy**.

- Accessible learning materials (e.g., captioned multimedia, accessible document formats).
- Designated spaces for interaction and communication (e.g., discussion forums).
- Clear tutor contact information and expectations for communication.
- Links to relevant learner support services and institutional policies.

Specific details of the current Moodle course template and its mandatory elements are maintained by the Education Technologist and communicated to staff through training and guidance materials. Justified pedagogical deviations from the standard template require consultation with the Education Technologist and may require approval from the Programme Lead or Academic Board.

Roles and Responsibilities:

The successful implementation of this policy relies on a collaborative approach:

- **Education Technologist:** Is responsible for developing, maintaining, and promoting the institutional Moodle course template; providing training and expert guidance to staff on VLE design, accessibility, and pedagogical best practice.
- **Programme Leads:** Are responsible for ensuring overall compliance with this policy across all modules within their programme(s), supporting tutors in maintaining standards, and integrating VLE quality considerations into programme review processes.
- **Lecturers and Tutors:** Are responsible for designing, developing, and maintaining their individual Moodle modules in accordance with this policy and the approved institutional template; ensuring content is accessible and up to date; and establishing a clear and supportive tutor presence.
- **Academic Board (and its relevant sub-committees, e.g., Academic Policy and QA Committee):** Provides oversight of VLE standards, approves this policy and significant changes to VLE templates, and reviews institutional compliance as part of the broader quality assurance framework outlined in the QA Manual.

Monitoring, Review, and Continuous Improvement:

The effectiveness of VLE module design and structure is subject to ongoing monitoring and cyclical review to ensure continuous improvement and alignment with best practice:

- **Module Spot Checks:** The Education Technologist will conduct spot checks of Moodle modules to assess compliance with this policy, providing feedback to Programme Leads and academic staff.
- **Learner Feedback:** Learner feedback on VLE usability, navigation, and accessibility will be systematically collected (e.g., through module evaluations) and analysed to inform enhancements.
- **Policy and Template Review:** This policy and the associated Moodle course template(s) will be reviewed annually by the Education Technologist, in consultation with academic staff and the Academic Board, considering learner/staff feedback, technological advancements, and evolving QA requirements.

- **Staff Development:** Findings from monitoring and review processes will inform the Staff Training and Development Policy and associated CPD activities to promote good practice in VLE design and digital pedagogy.

Policy Review:

This Policy on Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) Module Design and Structure will be reviewed every two years, or more frequently if required by significant changes in technology, QQI guidelines, or institutional strategy. The review will be led by the Education Technologist, with proposed revisions submitted to the Academic Policy and QA Committee and the Academic Board for approval.