

VLE Minimum Standards Toolkit



The purpose of the Canvas Course Design Toolkit is to support the application of VLE Minimum standards which have been co-designed by QUB Students in 2022 to ensure all Canvas courses offer a good and consistent digital pedagogic baseline across programmes of study. Step-by-step instructions and examples of how each standard can be applied in Canvas is available within the Toolkit.



1 A Homepage is included with links to key content within the course

Why is this important?

The main function of the course homepage is to direct learners to key areas of the course. Engagement is the obvious first step, closely followed by easy navigation. It has to be quick and simple for learners to find what they want. The ability to pin recent announcements at the top of the homepage is another benefit. A consistent homepage layout across modules within a programme is key.

Example of how this could look:

Check out the new [Homepage template](#) for QUB Canvas courses. Also, see the [HAPP Example Module](#) and the [EEECS Example Module](#)

Key things to remember:

- The homepage should not be cluttered, a simple welcome message and/or video is all you need
- Include links to the key content areas of the course that student's access frequently
- If using button hyperlinks, it is important to update links when preparing the course from the next academic year, otherwise the links may direct students back to the course for the previous academic year!

Step by step instructions:

- [How to add and edit new buttons to your homepage](#) [2:36 min]
- To add additional buttons:
 - Click '**Edit**' button on your homepage
 - Copy and paste one of the existing links and change the text to what you would like to appear on the button
 - The text will appear as a blue hyperlink when successfully copied. Test that the link works as expected
- To change the button's link:
 - Click '**Edit**' button on your homepage
 - Under '**Insert**', select '**Media**', and then select '**Course Media**'. A side window will appear
 - Under '**Course files**' select '**Links**' from the dropdown menu. You can now select one of the elements within the course to link the button to. Choose from pages, assignments, discussions, and 'modules'. The link will flash yellow once it has been successfully updated

Additional guidance/resources:

- View the new suite of [VLE Templates](#) for QUB Canvas courses
- See how easy it is to [import the new VLE Homepage template](#) into your canvas course(s)
- Learn how to [pin announcements to your homepage](#)

2 Important Course information is presented upfront

Why is this important?

This standard seeks to ensure that students can quickly and easily locate the important information about their course, such as learning outcomes, contact details of the teaching team, information on how the module will be assessed as well as details of where to get help.

Example of how this could look:

- View the new [Course Overview](#) module template for QUB Canvas courses.
- Explore how course information is presented in this [HAPP Example module](#).

Key things to remember

- Cut and paste excess content from your existing Homepage into a new Introductory 'Module' in your course
- Profile photos are strongly recommended in the 'Meet the Team' section. Hyperlink email addresses so students can easily contact you
- Consider adding important events to your course calendar. Note that assignments populate automatically on the calendar - you don't need to do this manually

- It is essential to regularly check that important course information is accurate in your Canvas course and aligns with the module handbook
- Consider the use of a centralised repository like a school-wide module for the purpose of linking to important course-related information or support services which are relevant to all courses within a programme of study (e.g. Library, Learning Development, Disability, Student Wellbeing, etc.). To ensure consistency, a school-wide agreement should be reached with regards to the presentation of such course information



Step by step instructions:

- This video demonstrates how you can [present important Course Information](#) [2:10 min] at the beginning of your course



Additional guidance/resources:

- See how to [import the new 'Course Overview' templates](#) into your own Canvas course(s)
- Link to instructions to [help student find their timetable on Queen's Online](#)
- How to [add a profile](#) as an instructor
- How to [add events](#) to the course calendar

3 Course **Navigation** is clear and consistent. Unused menu items are hidden

Why is this important?

With course navigation, it is essential to keep it simple and to maintain a consistent order of menu options across modules within a programme of study. Up to 72% of QUB students frequently access their courses via the Canvas mobile app (some use the app exclusively).

Example of how this could look:

- Check out an example of simple course navigation in the [Canvas VLE Templates](#) course
- Here is what a simple course menu looks like on the [student mobile app](#)

Key things to remember:

- Remove any unnecessary navigation links from the course navigation e.g., Quizzes, Attendance, Chat, BigBlueButton. Note, any hidden links can be easily unhidden at any stage
- Ensure navigation links are presented in a consistent order, agreed at programme level. Recommended order of top 3 links is: (1) Home, (2) Modules, (3) Discussions
- If you have embedded or linked course files from within pages, then consider hiding the FILES menu option from the course navigation

Step by step instructions:

- Watch a video on [how to remove and reorder navigation links](#) [1:58 min]
- To hide unnecessary navigation links:
 - Go to course '**Settings**' and select the '**Navigation tab**'
 - Click and drag the navigation links in the top area to the area underneath that mentions hiding items from students
 - Click '**Save**' once you are finished
- To reorder navigation links:
 - Go to course '**Settings**' and select the '**Navigation tab**'
 - Click and drag the navigation links in the top area to the desired order
 - Click '**Save**' once you are finished
 - Don't forget to test your updated course menu using the '**Student View**'

Additional guidance/resources:

See how to [import the full Canvas VLE Template course](#) into your own canvas course(s)

4 Course **Structure** has been created using the 'Module' feature with course content organised by weeks, themes or topics

Why is this important?

Course content should be organised into manageable units of study, with each unit providing a brief introduction that contextualises the learning materials within. Inconsistency can arise when there are several lecturers, each delivering a part of the module, with each taking a different approach to the presentation of their content.

Example of how this could look:

- Check out the weekly structure in the [Canvas VLE Templates](#) course
- See an excerpt from a course which is presented by topic from the [School of Pharmacy](#)

Key things to remember:

- Consider a logical flow that creates an effective learner journey, using the 'Modules' feature to structure your content
- Consult and agree on a structure with colleagues on the course to ensure consistent delivery
- Consider consultation within Programme teams to establish consistency across courses within a programme of study

- Establishing a good course structure will ensure that key learning content is served up at the appropriate point in the learning journey
- An effective structure incorporates factors like engagement, collaboration, application, etc.



Step by step instructions

- Watch a short video that demonstrates [how to use the 'Modules' feature](#) [6:38 min] to organise your course content



Additional guidance/resources

- See how to import an [example 'Weekly Topic' template](#) into your own canvas course(s)
- How to [use the 'Modules' feature](#) to build a framework for your course content so students can easily navigate through the learning materials in a meaningful way

5 Key learning content is populated within the course, including information on how module learning outcomes will be assessed

Why is this important?

This standard aims to make sure that important learning content is available, including course materials, multimedia resources, assessment information, supplemental textbooks, reading lists, and details on how learning activities relate to learning outcomes.

Example of how this could look:

View the new suite of [VLE Templates](#) for QUB Canvas courses for an example of how this could look

Key things to remember:

- Make Canvas a one-stop shop for all course materials and learning activities
- Check that learning activities align with learning outcomes. Make the link explicit for learners by adding a short line to justify each activity, for example: *“Watch this video to gain a more advanced understanding of French regional variation”*
- Place resources within the relevant weekly topic to help students easily find what they are looking for
- Embed multimedia content within Canvas pages so that students don't have to leave Canvas to access/view resources

- Avoid embedding or linking content from your OneDrive account as viewing permissions will expire after a 6 month period
- Where possible, provide original PPT version of PowerPoint slides rather than a PDF copy
- Review course content to ensure that it adheres to copyright legislation



Step by step instructions:

- How to [embed different types of multimedia content](#) [2:42 min] within a Canvas page



Additional guidance/resources:

- See how to [import the full Canvas VLE Template course](#) into your own canvas course(s) as a starting point for development
- Here is a helpful resource on [copyright law in education](#) which covers copyright exceptions for education and teaching

6 Recorded video content is available in the course

Why is this important?

Students place a high value on recorded content because it enables them to develop a thorough understanding of the topics taught. Students with learning disabilities and non-native speakers in particular benefit greatly from video recorded content.

Example of how this could look:

Link to the [HAPP Example Module](#), the [Pharmacy Example Module](#) and also the [EEECS Example Module](#) which all include examples of pre-recorded video

Key things to remember:

- Ensure that recorded video content created to support the course is embedded within Canvas pages
- Embedded video content should be hosted on a QUB supported streaming service, such as MS Stream or Mediasite and should be produced in a way that allows for automated captions
- It is good practice to also provide a direct hyperlink to the video, to support students who may encounter issues when accessing content on mobile devices
- Place a short introduction before the video in order to contextualise the content

Step by step instructions:

- How to [embed a video from MS Stream](#) [2:10 min]
- To embed from MS Stream:
 - Locate the video in MS Stream and click '**Share**'. In the pop-up window, it is recommended you toggle the '**Responsive**' toggle on. Click '**Copy**' to copy the embed code
 - Navigate to your Canvas page and click '**Edit**' to open the Rich Content Editor
 - Click the **Embed** icon (this looks like a cloud on the right-hand side). Paste the embed code in the pop-up window and click '**Submit**'
- How to [embed a video from Mediasite](#) [2:30 min]
- To embed from Mediasite:
 - Locate the video in Mediasite. Make sure the '**Who can view?**' toggle is set to **Everyone**, then click on '**Share Presentation**'
 - Select the '**Embed**' tab from the pop-up window and copy the embed code
 - Navigate to your Canvas page and click '**Edit**' to open the Rich Content Editor
 - Click the Embed icon (this looks like a cloud on the right-hand side). Paste the embed code in the pop-up window and click '**Submit**'

Additional guidance/resources:

- Understanding [file storage limits](#) in Canvas
- Understanding potential issues with student access to [MS Stream Videos](#)
- [Video content – don't Lose it, Re-use it!](#)
- How to host a video [MS Stream](#) or [Mediasite](#)

7 Compliance with **Accessibility** legislation for developed resources (including MS Word, PowerPoint, videos, etc.)

Why is this important?

Accessibility is a core part of making teaching and learning inclusive for all learners. Inclusive practice benefits everyone, and this is particularly true in a digital learning environment.

Example of how this could look:

Overview of a [course with a high accessibility score](#).

Key things to remember:

- Use the 'Ally Course Accessibility Report' within your course to identify issues. The report helps you determine priority and gives options for order of fixing and guidance on how to improve accessibility of your course content. Note that the report does not include accessibility of any embedded video content
- To quickly boost your course's accessibility score, review the contents of the course Files section and remove any files that are no longer in use
- PDFs can sometimes be problematic and inaccessible to screen readers, especially when they consist of scanned pages which is a series of images. Where possible, link out to original sources in the library, and upload original versions of files (e.g. PowerPoint and Word) if available

Step by step instructions:

- [How to fix accessibility issues](#) on your course
- To add check your course accessibility score:
 - Click on '**Ally Course Accessibility Report**' in your course navigation menu. If you cannot see this option, go to Navigation in your course's settings and drag it to the top so that it becomes visible
- File Housekeeping:
 - Click on '**Files**' in the course navigation menu.
 - Select '**Uploaded Media**'. To remove any files that are no longer in use, you can delete by clicking on the three dots and then '**Delete**'

Additional guidance/resources:

- Explore the [accessibility section](#) of the Digital Learning @ Queen's blog
- Access the [Canvas Accessibility Toolkit](#)
- Overview of [Blackboard Ally in Canvas](#)
- How to [create accessible Word documents and PDFs](#)
- How to [write good alternative text](#)

8 Any **Assignment** released through Canvas which contributes to the final mark should be set up in line with the official QUB guidance and regulations



Why is this important?

All assignments need to be set up in line with [official QUB guidance](#) and regulations. Important aspects include weighting of assignment groups, marking out of 100 points, setting appropriate dates. Students also require clear, concise, and helpful information associated with any assignments included in the course.

Example of how this could look:

Explore how assignment information is presented in the [HAPP Example Module](#) and the [EEECS Example Module](#)

Key things to remember:

- Outline how the assignment aligns with learning outcomes
- Provide clear instructions for learners on what is expected of them (e.g. assignment completion and submission, technology requirements, marking criteria, module weighting, mark scheme, word counts/format requirements, literature links for critical reviews, etc.)
- QUB guidance requires that assignments are marked out of 100

- Set appropriate dates i.e. 'Due', 'Available from' and 'Until' dates (with consideration of extensions, exceptional circumstances and late submissions)
- Always refer to the latest version of the [Canvas Assignment Checklist](#)



Step by step instructions:

- How to [Create Assignments and Assignment Groups in Canvas](#) [5:58 mins]
- Appropriate use of [Assignments in Canvas to support Continuous Assessment/Coursework](#)
- Appropriate use of [Assignments to support Exams](#)



Additional guidance/resources:

- Always refer to the latest version of the [Canvas Assignment Set-up Checklist](#) when setting up assignments in Canvas
- [QUB Handbook of Assessment Guidance and Support](#)
- [5 Top Tips for Setting up Canvas Assignments](#)
- [Top 5 Potential Assessment Set-up Pitfalls](#)



<http://go.qub.ac.uk/VLEMinimumStandardsToolkit>