Module design and development guidelines

Online Education Department, UCEM: April 2019

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Introduction

UCEM modules are nine-week long, self-contained blocks of learning, teaching and assessment delivered in a fully online environment. Each module has a clear educational purpose to develop particular knowledge, skills and behaviours to support our students’ success in the built environment. Modules are grouped and delivered one-at-a-time to create a pathway for our students to meet their programme outcomes and competencies, and ultimately lead to an educational award and professional accreditation.

Within each module students undertake planned and ordered authentic learning tasks with steps (activities), some of which are assessed either formatively, or as a contribution towards one of two module summative assessments.

These guidelines specifically support UCEM’s learning designers, content producers, and tutors in the design of modules and implementation of that design on the VLE. Teaching and facilitation guidelines will be developed individually for each module, with overarching practice guidelines developed prior to 2020 by UCEM.

Following a summary of the UCEM student experience and educational framework, each guide is presented in turn, containing critical information and recommendations to create effective, consistent, engaging online learning experiences.

Designing Transform modules: overarching principles

UCEM: Student experience

Our flexible approach to online learning gives students the freedom and support to balance their study, work and home commitments, while working towards their career goals. Students can take personalised routes through their study, choosing where and when they want to study, and what resources and activities they engage with. While weekly learning activities are provided to support students in planning their time, none are compulsory. Students are offered multiple options to engage with content and exchange with the learning community, which creates an inclusive and accessible environment.
To give our students the greatest chance of success, learning design at UCEM starts with learning outcomes and assessment design, with appropriate pedagogical approaches employed to provide authentic tasks and activities that clearly support student assessment.

Our approach can be broken down into three core areas:

1. **Learning design model: Student outcome-led design (SOLD).** A learning design model to structure our modules and provide consistency and a clear student journey. We begin our module design with the end in mind, using a backward design approach. We start with desired learning outcomes, clearly stated in measurable terms, and work backwards through assessment activities, teaching and learning activities and content delivery.

2. **Pedagogical approach: Participatory.** This approach builds knowledge, skills and competencies valued in industry through active engagement with learning content, engagement among learners and engagement with industry networks.

3. **Educator roles: Online presence.** There is tutoring and facilitating presence online from the beginning of the module, including teaching, social and cognitive presence, to create a holistic supported learning environment.
The guidelines
1. Module design

1. Learning outcomes
   a. The learning outcomes for the module are clear and align to the programme learning aims, and required professional competencies.
   b. Each topic, and learning task relates clearly to one or more learning outcome(s).
   c. Instructions for each learning task within topics clearly describe why students will benefit from undertaking the task(s) and how it relates to one or more learning outcomes. Each task is authentic.

2. Module requirements
   a. Make the level of prior knowledge and skills required of students very clear.
   b. Relate the module to previous and future modules in the programme to show how knowledge is built on and contributes to future understanding, skills and behaviours.
   c. Where appropriate, include a diagnostic test to enable students to assess whether they have the appropriate level of skill/knowledge required to start the module, and if not advise them how to develop this.

3. Linear narrative
   a. There is a logical sequence through topics, weeks and tasks.
   b. There is a clear journey towards the overall learning outcomes of the module.
   c. Tasks either take the form of a Moodle task page with steps or a Moodle lesson with steps.
   d. Steps in lessons and tasks are grouped together logically.
   e. The tutor voice is present throughout the narrative and is supportive in all aspects of the students’ learning journey.
   f. Extension activities are provided where students have opportunities to benefit from further knowledge or skills development beyond that required by the module assessments, and or to gain higher marks.
2. Structure

1. Module structure
   a. Each module runs over nine weeks, consisting of eight weeks of content and learning tasks and one week of summative assessment work.
   b. Each module has a banner at the top of the module page.
   c. Each module implements a consistent support area, which is reflected across all modules at that level of study, including Study Skills and the e-Library.
   d. Each module provides a module introduction video, orientation, contact information and short bios of the module team (see Guideline 4: Introduction and Week 1).
   e. Each module provides students with a module map to visualise the structure and topics of the module over nine weeks.
   f. Each module is structured to allow learning outcomes to be met before the assessment is scheduled.
   g. Each module is divided into appropriate topics, and in some cases subtopics. A topic can run over more than one week, depending on the module’s learning design.
   h. Students are provided with an indication of time for the length of topic/subtopic in weeks to support them to plan their time.

2. Topic/subtopic structure
   a. Each topic/subtopic has the following:
      • Introduction (see Guideline 3: Narrative), linking tasks to learning outcomes.
      • Common instructional materials and resources if the topic spans over a number of weeks.
      • One or two learning tasks per week, depending on the learning design
      • An opportunity for reflection.
      • Summary.
      • Extension tasks (where appropriate).

3. Task structure
   a. Each task has an overview made up of contextual text and steps:
      • **Contextual text** is a paragraph or two giving the context/rationale for the task (see Guideline 3: Narrative) covering a description of the task, task outcomes, how the task links to module outcomes and the assessment and whether there are any links to previous or upcoming tasks.
      • **Steps** are focused activities and resources that enable the student to complete the task. Steps help to develop particular knowledge, skills or behaviours to meet the stated learning outcomes.
   b. There is an indication of the time needed to undertake the task and steps
   c. Each task is made up of a mixture of steps (activities) from the focus areas listed below:
      • **Acquisition** – active acquiring knowledge/information through guided engagement with the resource or the active inquiry of researching to answer a question
      • **Production** – doing something with that knowledge/information
      • **Formative assessment** – practising a skill learnt or checking understanding
      • **Exchange** – sharing, collaborating or discussing with others about the new knowledge learnt
• **Reflection** – reflecting on what has been learnt and linking to previous knowledge and experience

e. Each task is made up of a mixture of resource types (e.g. read, listen, inquire, produce, practise, check, discuss, share, reflect, etc.). Tasks do not have to comprise every focus area, but there must be a balance (i.e. all steps should not be acquisition activities). It is recommended that each task provides an exchange and reflection/assessment activity.

f. Each task tries not to have more than five steps, unless there is a clear learning design need for more steps.

g. The focus of each step is clearly indicated on the task overview using colour-coded icons, banners and text. (See Guide 3: Narrative, for more details.)

4. **Final week (also see Guideline 11: End of module)**
   a. Each module ends with a final week round-up.
   b. Each module provides a final module evaluation for students to give feedback.
3. Narrative

When narrative is layered into a module’s structure, learning becomes embedded in a more natural context. A well-written and logical narrative can help students to engage with the module and its content both affectively as well as cognitively. This type of engagement helps students to build their own knowledge by making connections between information and their own experiences. A strong narrative also increases the impact of your module and its learning potential.

1. Topics and subtopics are grouped and sequenced in a way that facilitates the construction of a meaningful ‘story’ of what students should learn and why.
2. By reading all top-level items’ titles (topic titles, task titles, etc.) the student should be able to understand/follow the ‘story’ of the module.
3. The purpose of every task (and its associated learning resources/steps) is clearly articulated, covering how the task relates to the module learning outcomes and assessment, how students will benefit from the task and what students will be able to do as a result of undertaking the task.
4. Where tasks relate to professional competences required by awarding bodies, this is explained to students (an icon can also be used to help illustrate this).
5. Tasks are scaffolded into steps of learning activities and resources. It is made clear to students how they are expected to demonstrate their understanding, knowledge or skills against the stated learning outcomes.
6. Task steps should grow incrementally to a final activity that requires students to synthesise and apply their work from previous steps.
7. The tone of the narrative is approachable and friendly. Students are addressed directly (i.e. ‘you’). The tutor can ‘talk’ to students as an individual (i.e. use ‘I’) or be as part of the learning community (i.e. ‘we’).
8. Technical terms are explained or linked to a glossary, as are abbreviations, which are not used without spelling them out in the first instance.
9. Written narrative follows the UCEM style guide.
10. Resources and materials are appropriately cited and referenced.
11. Tasks and steps use appropriate instructional words to make it clear to students what the focus of the activity is. Refer to the table below for the focus areas for steps within tasks.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step focus area</th>
<th>Step aim</th>
<th>Verbs to use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Acquisition</strong></td>
<td>Active acquisition of knowledge/information (students given sources of information)</td>
<td>Read, watch, listen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Active inquiry (students finding sources of information)</td>
<td>Investigate, identify, research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Production</strong></td>
<td>Doing or creating something with the information learned</td>
<td>Produce, create, develop, summarise, formulate, synthesise, justify, present, evaluate, assess, demonstrate, illustrate, draw, sketch, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formative assessment</strong></td>
<td>Practise a skill with the knowledge/information used or checking understanding with formative feedback</td>
<td>Practise, check</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exchange</strong></td>
<td>Sharing or collaborating with other students relating to the new knowledge learnt</td>
<td>Collaborate, discuss, share, exchange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflection</strong></td>
<td>Reflect on what has been learnt and link to previous knowledge</td>
<td>Reflect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Introduction and Week 1

1. Detailed tutor team (tutors and facilitators) information is available to students. This includes multiple formats for being contacted, availability information, brief biographical information, and picture and/or video of the module team.

2. A video introduction to the module is provided by the module leader.

3. A detailed module orientation provides clear and detailed instructions for students to begin accessing all module components such as learning resources and tasks, module calendar, and assessments.

4. Students engage in a light introductory activity (e.g. to share their own learning goals or related to the module).

5. The module introduction should provide an overview for the whole module and introduce the module’s big questions and learning outcomes.

6. Week 1 should include an online seminar or other form of exchange to provide introductions. This also gives students opportunities to ask questions.

7. Consider including fewer tasks and learning resources in the first week to ease students into the module.

8. Include a congratulatory message to students at the end of Week 1 celebrating progress. (This could be repeated at various points in the module.)
5. Learner support

1. **General**
   a. A clear statement is provided of what students can expect from the tutor/facilitator in terms of support, open office hours, interaction and response times.
   b. Other methods of learning support are flagged to students relating to module orientation and the Study Skills area of the VLE.
   c. At appropriate times, students are guided to specific areas where they can get further support, for example, with their drawing skills development, maths skills or literacy skills.
   d. Modules follow Universal Design for Learning guidelines (see Guideline 6: Universal Design for Learning) to support variability in learning, including disability, language, gender, race and culture.

2. **Consistent UCEM terminology**
   a. Modules use terminology consistently and in line with UCEM’s VLE (for example, topic, week, task and steps – not courses and units; and module leader, tutor and facilitator– not professor).
   b. These terms are consistent with UCEM’s pedagogy.
Universal Design for Learning (UDL) enables the design of flexible learning environments that adapt to the variability of learners. UDL is research based and has been developed by CAST (the Center for Applied Special Technology [accessed 09/04/19]). UDL comprises three principles with associated guidelines that can be adapted to different teaching scenarios. The guidelines below are a subset of the UDL framework and they are of particular relevance to UCEM. It is good practice to follow these guidelines to provide flexibility in how information is provided to students and to allow students to demonstrate their learning in various ways. The US Higher Education Opportunity Act 2008 states that UDL is an approach that ‘reduces barriers in instruction, provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges, and maintains high achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient’ (CAST 2016).

1. **Provide multiple means of representation**
   a. Offer ways of customising the display of information.
   b. Offer alternatives to auditory information.
   c. Offer alternatives for visual information.
   d. Allow use of text-to-speech.
   e. Clarify vocabulary and symbols.
   f. Clarify syntax and structure.
   g. Present key concepts in one form of symbolic representation (e.g. an expository text or a maths equation) with an alternative form (e.g. an illustration, video photograph, animation).
   h. Anchor instruction by linking to and activating relevant prior knowledge (e.g. using visual imagery, concept anchoring or concept mastery routines).
   i. Give explicit prompts for each step in a sequential process.
   j. Introduce graduated scaffolds that support information processing strategies.
   k. Remove unnecessary content and activities unless they are essential to the learning outcome.
   l. Provide checklists.
   m. Incorporate explicit opportunities for review and practice.
   n. Offer opportunities over time to revisit key ideas and linkages between ideas.

2. **Provide multiple means of action and expression**
   a. Provide optimised access to assistive technologies.
   b. Students can use more than one format to participate in discussion (e.g. text, drawing, multimedia).

3. **Provide multiple means of engagement**
   a. Provide learners with as much discretion and autonomy as possible by providing choices in such things as:
      - content or context used for practising skills.
      - the sequence or timing for completion of subcomponents of tasks.
      - tools used for information gathering and processing.
   b. Involve learners, where and whenever possible, in setting their own learning goals.
   c. Vary activities and sources of information so that they can be:
      - personalised and contextualised to learners’ lives.
• culturally relevant and responsive.
• socially relevant.
• age and ability appropriate.
• appropriate for different racial, cultural, ethnic and gender groups.

d. Design tasks so that learning outcomes are authentic, communicate to real audiences, and reflect a purpose that is clear to the participants.

e. Provide tasks that allow for active participation, exploration and experimentation.

f. Invite personal response, evaluation and self-reflection to content and activities.

g. Include activities that foster the use of imagination to solve novel and relevant problems, and or make sense of complex ideas in creative ways.

(Adapted from CAST 2019)

References

7. Student interaction and community (social learning)

1. General
   a. At the beginning of the module, the tutor provides an opportunity for students to introduce themselves to develop the sense of a learning community.
   b. The module implements the UCEM Code of Conduct and reminds students that they have information available to them about how to be a successful online learner/student.
   c. Learning tasks facilitate and support active learning and encourages frequent and ongoing peer-to-peer engagement.
   d. Modes and requirements for student interaction are clearly communicated.
   e. The tutor clearly explains their role regarding participation in the online environment. The module team participates and manages, yet lets students take reasonable ownership.
   f. Every task has at minimum one social learning activity (e.g. discussion, sharing, peer feedback, group work, wider social networks).

2. Social learning types
   a. The module distinguishes between and supports multiple types of social learning, including, but not limited to, the following approaches:
      - Vicarious learning (browsing comments, filtering by ‘most liked’).
      - Learning through knowledge telling (making quick, easy contributions to the rolling set of comments and replies).
      - Learning through knowledge transforming (reflecting on learning, sharing perspectives and reaching shared understanding).
      - Learning by critiquing other people’s contributions and receiving constructive contributions (e.g. peer review activities).

3. Discussion activities
   a. Discussion activities provide open-ended questions designed to elicit a range of answers.
   b. The question requires students to demonstrate understanding of the immediate previous learning material, preferably also drawing on their prior experience.
   c. The questions encourage students to read and engage with other comments.

4. Learning activities using social media
   a. Participation in social media is not mandatory.
   b. A clear purpose for using social media is communicated based on the way(s) in which it supports module learning objectives.
   c. When directing students to external social media sites students should be made aware of the need, where it exists, for registration and agreement to terms and conditions outside of UCEM’s control (i.e. they are entering an agreement with the service provider and not UCEM).
   d. Where the social media site involves potential interaction with a wider audience, issues relating to online identity, personal safety and the impact over time of an individual’s ‘digital footprint’ should be highlighted.
   e. Guidelines for appropriate online behaviour should be discussed with students in advance of using a social media site, including the importance of establishing an online identity which is suitable for an academic or professional context. Where applicable, professional body guidance should be shared and discussed with students.
f. Provide or link to information for technical support and documentation for students.
8. Group work

Being able to work successfully with others towards a common goal is a valuable skill throughout a student’s working life. Collaboration and co-operation allow students to learn from, and benefit from, their peers by pooling expertise. UCEM aims to foster group work and collaboration in most modules.

1. Informal study groups
   a. Students are encouraged to form their own informal study groups and advised to refer to the relevant induction materials to guide them.

2. If a module implements formal group work
   a. Groups are introduced early in the module so that students know how to engage with them and how to form groups.
   b. When groups are introduced, students are immediately given a task (light-hearted) to do in their group that sets the tone for future activities.
   c. Below the task instructions, further information about groups is provided (e.g. the benefits of study groups, the UCEM Code of Conduct, etc.).
   d. The module includes regular, structured, achievable tasks for the group to perform.
   e. The module team makes it clear what level of involvement they will have in the groups. If there will be no facilitation, there are clear instructions provided for groups to feedback what they are learning to the wider cohort.
9. Reflection

The Quality Assurance Agency for England states that one of the foundations of effective learning is when students are enabled to ‘demonstrate understanding of, and an ability to reflect upon, the ways in which their skills and knowledge are developing ‘and ‘recognise and value their existing knowledge and skills, and build upon them’ (QAA 2018: 9). Reflection is an essential part of a student’s learning journey. The better they become at reflecting, the more they will be able to guide their own learning and development as a lifelong skill.

1. Reflections demonstrate analytic thinking, self-awareness and an honest self-evaluation of learning.
2. It is explained clearly why it is important to reflect and how students will benefit.
3. Across a module, reflection activities include self-reflection and reflection with others.
4. Reflective activities are directly linked to learning, progress, professional development and key competencies.
5. Reflection is scaffolded into four phases, each of which may include one or more reflective activities:
   a. The student before learning: where are they at the start of the module? What skills and experience do they come with?
   b. The student during learning: reflection on progress, how they are learning, mapped to learning outcomes, key competencies and skills.
   c. The student after learning: reflection on the significance of what they have learnt.
   d. The student going forwards: synthesise their learning. How will they be able to take what they learned and apply it elsewhere? What questions should they be asking to explore further learning and application? Next steps in developing their learning and skills?
6. Reflections are relevant and meaningful, and tutors support reflective practice in the following ways:
   a. Providing feedback for students.
   b. Designing peer feedback activities.
   c. Encouraging students to add reflection to their personal e-portfolios.
   d. Designing and leading group discussions.

Reference

10. Peer review

1. **General**
   a. A peer review activity must be clear and manageable in the space provided. Only use this activity type if it fits with the aims of the module.
   b. There are two methods of peer review: formal and informal.

2. **Formal**: using a formal peer review tool (Moodle workshop activity with formal rubric)
   a. A clear rubric is provided for each stage of the peer review activity.
   b. The activity has three stages: the student uploads their work; they review another student’s work; and they see a review of their own uploaded work.
   c. No more than one formal peer review activity per module is allowed as it usually spans over a three-week period (task submission, peer review and review feedback).
   d. The peer review activity should relate to the assessment to encourage students’ participation, e.g. make it part of the e-portfolio activity. The tutor reviews/amends reviewing students’ feedback before it is released to the student.

3. **Informal**: using a less formal approach such as Padlet or forum, where students are given set instructions on how to critique other students’ work.
11. End of module

1. Congratulate students on completing the module.
2. Restate the learning outcomes of the module and how they have been covered in the module.
3. Encourage learners to reflect on what they have learned.
4. The tutor provides students with feedback about their overall learning and progress and their experiences of the module.
5. Students are invited to give their feedback on the module via the module evaluation (see module evaluation guidelines).
6. The tutor provides students with opportunities to ask questions as a form of closure and to foster insight into accomplishments.
12. Module evaluation

1. General
   a. Module evaluation is a comprehensive and systematic means of gathering student feedback on each module, enabling review and improvement.
   b. Module evaluation should be used to enhance the quality of the teaching, learning and assessment experience.
   c. Each module is evaluated every time it is delivered.
   d. The purpose of module evaluation should be communicated to students, potentially in induction packs, and students should be informed of their responsibility to provide constructive feedback.
   e. Both end-of-module evaluation and short in-module evaluations are implemented.

2. End-of-module evaluation
   a. Adapt the standard UCEM module evaluation form to suit your module.
   b. Consider aligning questions with the National Student Survey (but not for NSS eligible students in their last year of study). This could help identify areas to address before students reach their final year.

3. In-module evaluation
   a. Include short, specific evaluation questions at the end of each topic to foster a sense of ongoing dialogue with students about their experiences of the module.
   b. Capture evaluation of summative assessments separately, for example, immediately after students complete these assessments.
   c. Embed digital evaluation tools such as polling apps to collect and summarise electronic responses in synchronous teaching (e.g. in seminars). This is especially beneficial to capture student understanding of key concepts and adapt teaching to address areas of difficulty.
   d. The types of questions employed should encourage students to reflect on their own learning.
   e. The module provides a space where evaluation outcomes can be shared with students.
13. Media

1. **Media assets for modules**
   a. Each module has one professionally produced module introduction video (2-3 minutes maximum).
   b. Each module has short video biographies of the module team (30 seconds to 1 minute maximum).
   c. Each module contains one professionally produced graphic/animation (if appropriate).
   d. Mini-lectures should be produced as voice-over slide shows unless a pedagogical reason has been identified.
   e. Voice-overs and other audio assets are recorded and produced as high-quality audio in a studio, with support from the Media team.
   f. Requests for additional media assets, including location shooting, interviews and tutorials, are reviewed by the Transform Media Panel on a case-by-case basis, with priority given to learning resources that have cross module / programme value.
   g. Videos for topic round-ups, feedback and discussion posts can be recorded and uploaded by tutors using their own or UCEM devices (guidance supplied), and do not need to be scripted.

2. **Media asset attributes**
   a. Although prepared scripts are not required, all media assets will be planned, storyboarded and thought out to ensure concise, relevant and engaging resources.
   b. It is recommended that media assets will be no longer than:
      - Location video: 8-10 minutes
      - Interview: 4 – 8 minutes
      - Mini lectures: 4 – 6 minutes
   c. Transcripts are provided for all media assets.
   d. Captions are provided for all professionally produced assets.
# 14. Accessibility

When creating accessible learning materials:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Avoid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always use a combination of colour, shapes and text to convey meaning to help colour blind learners.</td>
<td>Avoid using colour as the only way to convey meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always use left-aligned text, 1.5 line spacing and a suitable font size - usually 12pt for documents, web, and print to help learners with dyslexia.</td>
<td>Avoid centre and right alignment of text or full justification.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always break up information with meaningful headings, sub-headings and one-level bullet lists.</td>
<td>Avoid complex or cluttered layouts, multi-layered menus or lists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always write headings in sentence case and use heading styles rather than using large bold text for titles to help learners with screenreaders.</td>
<td>Avoid the use of text size, all capital letters and layout as the only way to convey structure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always add meaningful alternative (alt) text to all images (for screenreader users) and transcripts for videos (for learners with hearing impairments).</td>
<td>Avoid the use of rich media content without providing a text alternative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always use sufficient colour contrast from the background to help learners with visual impairments.</td>
<td>Avoid low colour contrasts, small font sizes and cursive or script fonts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always make important information clear and easy to find.</td>
<td>Avoid underlined words, italics and all capital letters for emphasis, headings or body text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always write descriptive and meaningful hyperlinks and use a URL shortener if required. This helps learners using screenreaders.</td>
<td>Avoid using uninformative links and never use ‘click here’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always ensure all content can be navigated with a keyboard to help learners with motor disabilities.</td>
<td>Avoid forcing control by use of a mouse or touch screen alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always allow user control and navigation of all video and audio content.</td>
<td>Avoid the automatic start of any audio or video content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always use available tools to check accessibility of your content e.g. use Microsoft Word’s Check Accessibility</td>
<td>Avoid considering accessibility as a good to have add-on. Accessibility laws have changed, and ignorance is no excuse.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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15. Assessment

Awaiting Assessment team