

UCD Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) Retention Policy



Policy owner:
UCD IT Services

Approval date and body: May 2024

University Management Team (UMT)

1. Purpose

The retention policy for the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) within the university is to ensure the efficient management and preservation of digital content and user data within the online educational platform. The policy supports the broader spectrum of information management and data governance. Its primary aim is to address concerns related to data security, compliance with regulations, resource optimisation, and facilitating effective learning experiences for students and educators.

The retention policy for the VLE is crucial for governing the lifecycle of digital assets, including course materials, user data, communication records, and administrative documents.

As a new module offering is created for modules each trimester, it is imperative that the university manages our digital assets more effectively, and ensures that the VLE does not become a data storage facility. This policy aims to ensure the integrity of the VLE is retained as a teaching and learning management system to support the delivery of teaching. Faculty will retain the functionality to copy learning material into new versions of modules to support teaching and learning, however only material required for module delivery be brought forward.

2. Definitions

- **Digital Content:** All forms of digital materials, including but not limited to course & assessment materials, communication records, and administrative documents.
- **User Data:** Information related to users of the VLE, including personally identifiable information (PII), academic records, and user-generated content.
- **Retention Period:** The specified duration for which different types of digital content and user data are stored within the VLE.

3. Scope

This policy details the principles and procedures governing the retention of digital content within the university's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). It applies to:

Users:

- Students enrolled in modules offered through the university's VLE.

- Faculty members, instructors, and teaching assistants are responsible for creating, managing, and delivering course content within the VLE.
- Professional staff involved in the maintenance, support, and operation of the VLE platform.
- Any other individuals granted access to the VLE for educational or administrative purposes.

Digital Content:

- Course materials, including lectures, presentations, readings, and assignments, are created and uploaded to the VLE.
- Communication records, such as discussion forum posts, emails, announcements, and chat transcripts exchanged within the VLE.
- User data and profiles containing personally identifiable information (PII), login information, academic records, and assessment results stored within the VLE database.
- Administrative documents, policies, and reports relevant to the operation and management of the VLE platform.

Scope of the Policy:

Data Retention:

- Defines the duration for which different types of digital content are retained within the VLE platform.
- Specifies retention periods based on regulatory requirements, institutional policies, and educational best practices.
- Outlines procedures for periodic review and deletion of digital content to ensure compliance with retention guidelines.
- Relates only to services supported by IT Services and does not include locally purchased or managed services within schools or colleges.

Exceptions to the Policy:

- This policy does not apply to data once it is extracted or downloaded from the VLE by users for their own purposes. Any data exported from the VLE for individual purposes falls outside the scope of this policy, underscoring the user's responsibility for managing such data in compliance with applicable data protection laws and university regulations.
- Certain categories of digital content may be exempt from standard retention periods due to legal, contractual, or academic considerations.
- Exceptions may apply to specific types of data or circumstances where extended retention is warranted for educational, research, or administrative purposes. Procedures for requesting and documenting exceptions to the retention policy, including justification and approval processes will be made available on the IT Support Knowledge Base www.ucd.ie/ithelp.

Note: User accounts are disabled in line with guidelines provided by [IT Services](#). When an account is disabled, all student interactions are hidden within a module and are only reactivated if the account is re-enabled.

4. Principles

Guiding Principles of the Retention Policy:

- **Compliance with Regulations:** The policy prioritises adherence to relevant data protection laws, privacy regulations, and continued alignment with institutional policies governing the retention and management of digital content within the VLE.
- **Data Security and Confidentiality:** Protecting user data and digital content integrity, confidentiality, and availability is paramount. The policy emphasises the implementation of robust security measures and access controls to safeguard sensitive information from unauthorised access, disclosure, or tampering.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** The policy promotes transparency in the handling of digital content by clearly defining retention periods, access controls, and procedures for disposal or deletion. It holds stakeholders accountable for their roles and responsibilities in managing and preserving digital assets within the VLE platform.
- **Resource Efficiency and Optimisation:** Striving for resource efficiency, the policy aims to optimise storage space and computing resources by establishing guidelines for the periodic review, archival, and disposal of digital content.
- **Learning Continuity and Quality:** Ensuring the continuity and quality of teaching and learning is a key principle. The policy seeks to preserve and maintain access to course materials, communication records, and user data to support uninterrupted learning experiences for students and instructors.
- **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Recognising the dynamic nature of teaching and learning environments, the policy allows for flexibility in accommodating evolving technological advancements, pedagogical approaches, and regulatory requirements while maintaining consistency in retention practices.
- **Ethical Use of Data:** Upholding ethical standards in the collection, use, and retention of user data is fundamental. The policy promotes responsible data stewardship and prohibits using or exploiting personal information for unauthorised purposes.
- **Sustainability and Best Practices in Data Management:** The policy promotes sustainable practices in data management by minimising data redundancy, optimising resource utilisation, and reducing environmental impact. It advocates for best practices in data governance, including data quality assurance, metadata management, and lifecycle management, to ensure the long-term sustainability and usability of digital content within the VLE platform.

Retention Periods:

The VLE content retention policy ensures that students and faculty have appropriate access to course materials within 'My Learning' for varying durations, consistent with academic progression and administrative requirements. This policy aligns with the university's recommended thirteen-month retention period for all assessed work and outcomes. Additionally, the policy encompasses not only the native VLE components but also integrated services for example virtual classroom and video management solutions, aiming to create a cohesive and comprehensive retention framework across all educational technologies.

Each academic year, new iterations of modules are created to reflect the current academic cycle, such as Autumn 2022 or Spring 2023. The policy specifies the maximum period that content for each of these module iterations will be available following its completion, ensuring that only the relevant and current iterations are maintained within the VLE environment. The retention duration for each module level, applied from the end date of the module iteration, is as follows:¹:

Level 0 Modules: Content is retained for up to 2 years

Level 1 Modules: Content is retained for up to 4 years

Level 2 Modules: Content is retained for up to 3 years.

Level 3 and Above Modules: Content is retained for up to 2 years.

See [appendix 1](#) for a worked example.

It is important to note that while the above outlines the maximum retention durations, certain elements of the VLE content may be subject to removal before the end of these periods by the previously detailed principles. These retention periods are outlined below.

¹ Please note where programmes have a duration of more than four years, such as medicine and veterinary medicine, the retention period will align with the duration of the programme. Where new programmes are created with a duration greater than four years, the school should notify IT Services. via the IT Helpdesk.

VLE Content Type	Retention Period	Additional Remarks
General Learning Content	2-4 years dependent on the module type	See above and appendix 1 for further details.
Assignment Submissions	13 Months	Includes all student submissions
Quiz Submissions	13 Months	Includes all student quiz attempts
Feedback	13 Months	Includes all forms of feedback provided
Assignment Structure	Aligned to the duration of Learning Content	Includes all assignment settings, rubrics and related multimedia
Quiz Structure	Aligned to the Duration of Learning Content	Includes question banks, questions and all quiz settings
Grades	13 Months	Includes Grade Items, Students Grades in the VLE
Discussions Graded	13 Months	
Discussions (not graded)	Aligned to the Duration of Learning Content	As outlined for modules levels
Surveys	Aligned to the Duration of Learning Content	As outlined for module levels

Integrated Services		
Virtual Classroom (Zoom)	Staff - 400 Days Students- 40 Days	
Video Content (YuJa)	Last viewed 400 Days	This is usage/access related.
Peer Assessment	13 Months	
Originality Checker	Indefinitely	Assignments which have been submitted to the UCD assignment archive will be anonymised and retained indefinitely, to allow future student submissions to be checked for text matching against the UCD archive.
Student Response	Linked to Account	
Accessibility Checker	Duration of Content	
iThenticate	Indefinitely	
Student feedback	7 years	
Bongo	13 Months	
Integrity Advocate	13 Months	

Module Type	Retention Period	
Explore, Booking Centre and other zero credit modules	Annual renewal - if not renewed within 15 months - deleted	
Programme Space Modules	Upon request from the College or School Office Director	
Sandbox Modules	Once a year for disabled accounts only	
Academic/Resit Modules	See VLE content above	

5. Roles and Responsibilities

UCD IT Services:

- Communicate the retention policy for the VLE.
- Allocate resources for implementing and maintaining the policy.
- Ensure compliance with relevant laws, regulations, and institutional policies.
- Provide training and support to users on policy requirements and best practices.
- Oversee the implementation of the policy and conduct periodic reviews for effectiveness.
- Designate individuals or committees responsible for monitoring and enforcing policy adherence.
- Address exceptions, disputes, or violations of the policy as needed.
- Develop and maintain technical infrastructure to support data retention and management within the VLE.
- Implement security measures to protect digital content and user data from unauthorised access or breaches.
- Establish backup and disaster recovery procedures to ensure data resilience and availability.
- Conduct regular audits and assessments of data storage, security, and compliance with the retention policy.
- Provide technical support and assistance to users for data management and retention-related issues.
- Document and maintain records of policy-related activities, exceptions, and audit trails as needed.

Faculty and Instructors:

- Create and upload course materials to the VLE in accordance with the VLE standards and retention policy.

- Manage and organise digital content within the VLE platform, following established retention guidelines while adhering to the VLE Standards.
- Report any technical issues, concerns, or violations of the retention policy to appropriate authorities.
- Facilitate the transfer or disposal of digital content no longer required for educational or administrative purposes.
- Adhere to data security protocols when accessing, sharing, or handling sensitive information within the VLE.
- Recognise that the VLE is designed for course delivery and interaction, and is not intended for the long-term archiving of materials. Instructors should consider this when planning for the storage of learning materials needed for institutional purposes beyond the immediate scope of the VLE. This may be relevant for faculty on leave or sabbatical in particular.
- When it becomes necessary to extract materials from the VLE, instructors must ensure these materials are securely stored and managed in compliance with data protection laws and university regulations.
- Faculty must ensure that students have access to learning materials to support their learning, this includes students who may have taken a Leave of Absence or have extenuating circumstances for individual modules. Students should not be disadvantaged due to the VLE data retention periods.
- Where a student requests extended access to modules due to extenuating circumstances, faculty members or a nominee (such as Head of School or School Head of Teaching Learning) ,where the faculty member is not available, should apply for an exception to retain module content via the exceptions process.

Students:

- Access and utilise digital content and resources provided within the VLE for educational purposes.
- Report any technical issues, concerns, or violations of the retention policy to appropriate authorities.
- Adhere to acceptable use policies and guidelines for responsible use of digital content within the VLE.
- Retain local copies of learning and assessment materials beyond the retention periods should they wish to retain them.
- In instances where students have extenuating circumstances or a leave of absence, students must ensure that they familiarise themselves with VLE retention periods and if they wish to retain access to material they should request extended access to learning material with module coordinators, where applicable.

Professional Staff:

- Assist faculty and instructors in managing digital content and communication within the VLE.
- Provide support and guidance to users regarding policy compliance, data management, and retention practices.
- Facilitate the transfer or disposal of digital content no longer required for educational or administrative purposes.
- Report any technical issues, concerns, or violations of the retention policy to appropriate authorities.

6. Related documents

- UCD Assessment Code of Practice - https://hub.ucd.ie/uisis/IW_HU_MENU.P_PUBLISH?p_tag=GD-DOCLAND&ID=104
- UCD VLE Standards - <https://www.ucd.ie/teaching/t4media/UCD%20VLE%20Standards%20Policy.pdf>
- UCD Modules Types - <https://www.ucd.ie/itservices/ourservices/educationaltechnologies/aboutbrightspace/moduletypes/moduletypedetails/>
- UCD Account Access - https://fujitsuireland.service-now.com/itucd?id=kb_article_ucd&sys_id=c1a7d5d51b3cb410367bbc16464bcb34&table=kb_knowledge

7. Version history

Version	Date	Description	Author
Version 1.0	07 May 2024	Creation of the policy	UCD IT Services

Appendix One - Example of how the module retention would work.

Module Code	Level	Retention Period	Example (Year 2020)	Deletion Year
ABC00010	0	2 years	ABC00010-2020 -AUT ABC00010-2020 -SPR	June 2023
ABC10010	1	4 years	ABC10010- 2020-AUT ABC1010-2020 -SPR	June 2025
ABC20020	2	3 years	ABC20020-2020-AUT ABC20010-2020 -SPR	June 2024
ABC30030	3	2 years	ABC30030-2020-AUT ABC30010-2020 -SPR	June-2023
ABC40030	4	2 years	ABC40030-2020-AUT ABC40010-2020 -SPR	June-2023
ABC50030	5	2 years	ABC50030-2020-AUT	June-2023

All policies and policy related documents and forms are subject to amendment. Please refer to the UCD Governance Document Library website for the official, most recent version.

Module Code	Level	Retention Period	Example (Year 2020)	Deletion Year
			ABC50010-2020 -SPR	

This table illustrates an example of the retention periods and deletion years for digital content associated with different module levels within the university's virtual learning environment, using the example of the year 2020. In this example, 'ABC20020' is a Level 2 module, indicating that staff and students would have access to the module's content for up to 3 years, with deletion planned for June 2024. However, it should be noted that associated materials, such as assessments, are retained for variable periods prior to this, as dictated by the retention policy.