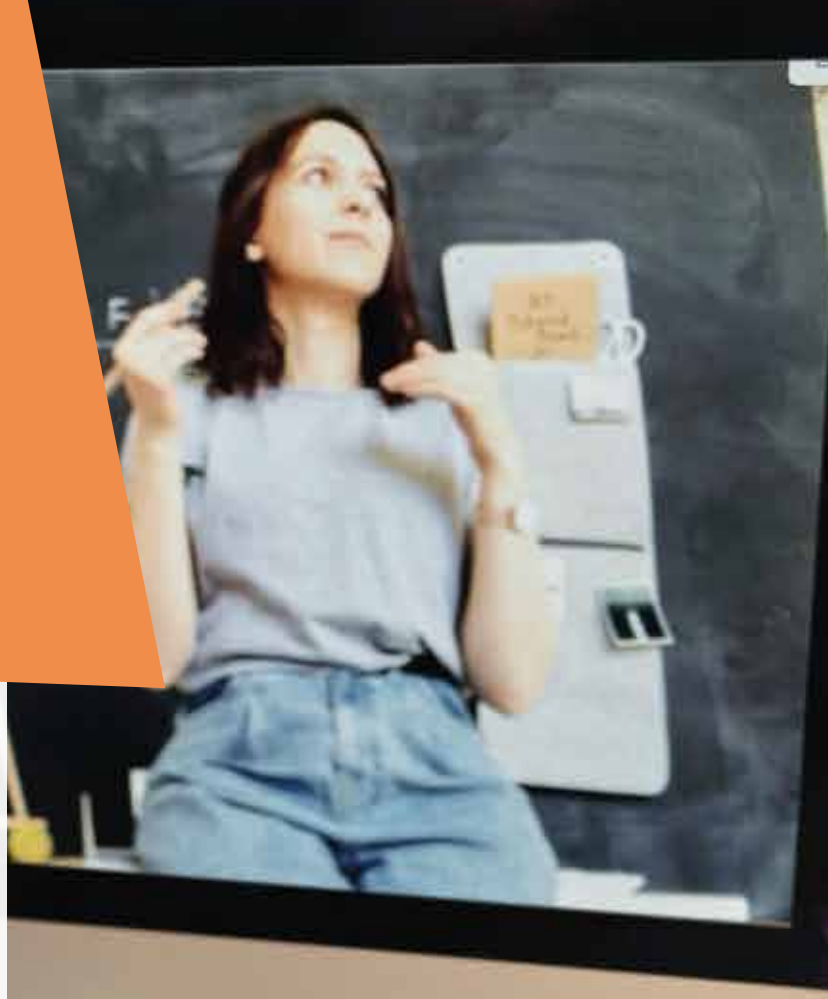
Malta
Further & Higher
Education Authority



GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE – FOR ONLINE LEARNING PROVIDERS IN MALTA.

Prepared by the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority.

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Executive Summary

The Guidelines for Quality Assurance for Online Learning Providers were developed following the deployment of an online survey with Maltese Further and Higher Education Institutions (FHEI) to investigate the implementation of online courses and programmes quality assurance measures in Further and Higher Education in Malta. Eight Domains for Online Learning Quality Assurance mentioned in professional publications on the subject were adopted and rephrased for the purpose of the survey to identify the presence or absence of such criteria at FHEI in Malta.

Domain 1. Leadership and Management

a) Online and blended learning are part of the institution's vision, and this is reflected in all strategic, policy and quality assurance documents.
b) Budgets cater adequtely for the technical infrastructure, training, and systems for online and blended delivery.
c) There is evidence of adequate cyclical reviews of online and blended programmes/courses.

Domain 2. Staffing Profile and Professional Development

a) The institutions should have a key managerial post or a unit dedicated to the management of online and blended learning from an educational perspective, and involved faculty in the design of programmes/courses.
b) Academic staff should have suitable qualifications and experience in online and blended learning and engage in continuous professional development in this area of expertise.
c) Both academic staff and technical staff should appreciate pedagogical and technical aspects and ethical implications of online and blended learning.

Domain 3. Review and Improvement

a) Cyclical review and improvement processes need to include online and blended learning, and all the institution's staff and students are involved through regular feedback loops.
b) Online and blended learning are audited through established quality assurance models that would have been adapted to these new pedagogical and methodological approaches.
c) Technology should enable change, not drive it. The primary business case in any FHEI institution should be presented in the name of teaching, learning, and assessment.

Domain 4. Resources

a) Online learning is more than just uploading resources online for students to access independently. Relevant online resources should contribute to the creation of real engagement between the tutors and the students.
b) Teaching, learning, and assessment should be closely aligned and provide the business case for the investment in digital, material and human resources. It should not be a case of using technology for the sake of it or for publicity purposes.
c) There should be clear policies that cover such issues as recording of lectures and meetings, acceptable use, security, data protection, and intellectual property.
d) Any third-party digital resources purchased by the institution should be scalable, avoid vendor-lock-in and be covered by a service-level agreement for maintenance and support by the vendor.
e) Faculty and students should be able to access most of the administrative and academic resources online without the need of being physically on campus and without investing in high-end hardware and software.

Domain 5. Student Information, Experience, and Support

a) The design of the programmes, courses and study units put the learner at the centre of learning, teaching and assessment.
b) Faculty are presented with an orientation session on support mechanisms for students and use data anlytics to follow their students' progress.
c) Students should receive the necessary orientation on the use of the Virtual Learning Environment, digital tools, and support services (educational, technical, and counseling).
d) The institution's policies, rules, regulations and procedures should include the student's experience in online and blended learning. The responsibilities of academic staff, the administrative staff, the non-academic staff and the students should be clearly defined to support the development of a positive student experience.

Domain 6. Assessment and Integrity

a) Online assessments are aligned with and mapped against programme and course learning outcomes.
b) Online proctoring systems and online technologies are put in place to effectively assess students' learning.
c) Students are trained how to appropriately paraphrase, cite, and reference both online and printed sources in their academic writing. Plagiarism rules are clear.
d) In blended courses, summative assessments (final exams) apart from performance assessments (research paper, project, etc.) are conducted on campus.

Domain 7. Learning Outcomes

a) The course syllabi, course content and assessments are alignment with Programme Learning Outcomes (PLOs).
b) Face-to-face programmes that are delivered online need a total review on the design of the learning outcomes, their delivery and assessment, and it should include a reference to pedagogies that enhance student interaction and gauge student learning.
c) A comparison between the performance of students in face to face, blended, and online programmes is available.
d) Follow-up graduate and employee surveys demonstrate achieved learning outcomes and reflect skills and competences required in the 21st century workplace.

Domain 8. Curriculum Design

a) Pedagogical practices are evident in the design of curricula, demonstrating innovative practices such as project-based learning, simulations, internships, work-based learning and case-based learning.
b) Teaching staff and administrators who are involved in developing and evaluating online and blended programmes have proper training in online learning design.
c) Student feedback and periodic programme review are conducted on a set policy.

Introduction

The Guidelines for Quality Assurance for Online Learning Providers were developed following the deployment of an online survey with Maltese Further and Higher Education Institutions (FHEI) to investigate the implementation of online courses and programmes quality assurance measures in Further and Higher Education in Malta. The survey was developed based on the Quality Assurance of Online Learning Toolkit developed by The University of Melbourne in Australia. This particukar toolkit describes Nine Domains for Online Learning Quality Assurance. These domains, complete with specific criteria, were adopted and rephrased for the purpose of the survey to identify the presence or absence of such criteria at FHEI in Malta.

Based on the findings of the survey, the guidelines were developed following a detailed analysis of the results and with reference to the Quality Assurance of Online Learning Toolkit developed by The University of Melbourne in Australia, Considerations for Quality Assurance of eLearning Provision (2018) developed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, and other regulations and guidelines of the MFHEA. These guidelines address eight domains relevant to quality assurance in online learning programmes, and they are adapted to reflect the Maltese context of large and smaller further and higher education institutions and the local education sector:

Domain 1. Leadership and Management

Domain 2. Staffing Profile and Professional Development

Domain 3. Review and Improvement

Domain 4. Resources

Domain 5. Student Information, Experience, and Support

Domain 6. Assessment and Integrity

Domain 7. Learning Outcomes

Domain 8. Curriculum Design

Definitions

Asynchronous Learning: Learning that occurs when the educator and the learners are not communicating and engaging in real time - More commonly known as self-study.

Blended Learning: A formal education programme in which learners engage at least in part through online delivery of content and instruction with some element of learner control over time, place, path and/or pace, and at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location with face-to-face interaction away from home. The ratio between online and face-to-face learning is decided by the educator and/or the programme on the basis of the related pedagogical principles and the programmes needs but both modes are complementary in the programme.

Contact Hour: A contact hour in online learning consists of a definite period of time where the students learns something new under the supervision/support of an educator. This can happen at the same time, i.e. both the student and the educator are engaged in a synchronous session, or asynchronously, where the student is first exposed to the new knowledge through recorded content (e.g. a video or podacst) and then there is subsequent asynchronous supervision and support from the tutor. When the student does independent reading or watches the content without direct support this is not considered as a contact hour but as independent learning.

Face-to-Face Learning: Learning that happens physically on campus in a classroom with the presence of an instructor and the learners.

Online Learning: Also known as e-learning, is a form of education in which teachers and students are physically separated. Communication between the educator and the learner occurs via telecommunication or such services as mail. In the 21st century the term has been replaced by e-learning as almost all distance learning is being based on electronic communication such as the internet. This electronic communication needs to lead to learning based on pedagogical principles to be accepted as learning, otherwise it is simply a means of communication. E.g., email correspondence between a supervisor and learner doing research is not e-learning but simple communication using the Internet. However, a video/audio conference call between the two to discuss research methods and provide feedback does constitute e-learning over distance.

Synchronous Learning: When the educator and the learners engage in real time through web-conferencing tools such as Zoom, Teams, WebEx, Skype, Facetime, Google Meet etc.

Domain 1. Leadership and Management

The top positions in an educational institution are held by active promoters and supporters of online and blended learning by providing the necessary vision, mission, strategy, and policies. They also nurture a culture of quality through consultation and cyclical reviews.

Applicable MFHEA Internal Quality Assurance Standards

Standard 1. Policy for Quality Assurance
Standard 2. Institutional Probity

Indicators for all FHEI institutions

1. Online and blended learning are part of the institution's vision.
2. Strategic and policy documents mention quality online and blended courses.
3. A quality assurance policy covers online and blended delivery.
4. A key managerial post or unit dedicated to the management of online and blended learning from an educational point of view is allocated at the institution.
5. Budgets that cater adequtely for the technical infrastructure, training, and systems for online and blended delivery are clearly included in the total budget of the institution.
6. There is evidence of adequate cyclical reviews of online and blended programmes/courses.

Further guidance for small FHEI institutions

i. It is recommended to bring expertise from outside the organisation to build capacity and develop/review the institution's vision, strategic policy, and quality assurance policy.
ii. It is easier to manage modular, off-the-shelf, well-supported, and cloud-based software solutions. Institutions are advised to pay attention to licencing fees, whether based on seats / users, by time, by volume of data handled etc. Institutions are advised to do their homework first before talking to marketeers and salesmen. Outsource and use the cloud as infrastructure.
iii. A key managerial post or unit is necessary. In the case of a small organisation it is more likely the responsibility will be carried out by just one person but make sure that the person has the necessary qualifications and experience in online and blended learning. This recruitment should be done first before investing in any technology and the appointed person/s should be involved in the drawing up of the strategic and policy documents.
iv. The cyclical reviews of courses and programmes for which outsiders from the organisation are appointed can sometimes lead to talent spotting and recruitment for other academic roles within the organisation.
v. Keep up to date with education and technology trends.
vi. Take a horizontal approach through team-work rather than a top-down or bottom-up approach in terms of task and project management.
vii. Seek affilitations and partnerships with small, like-minded institutions in and outside education that share at least part of your vision.
viii. Check funding provided by the European Union institutions, national funds and other funds/sponsorships from other institutions for capacity building and institutional development.

Supporting resources

- Check Ministry for Education of Malta, the European Union institutions and other international institutions like UNESCO for policy papers and strategic documents.
- Moodle (http://www.moodle.org/) is free and open source virtual learning environment (no licencing fees for using it but an institution needs to pay for its server hosting and maintenance online). It is used by the major public higher education institutions in Malta and it is so popular abroad that there is a strong community of practice with readily-available free support.

Domain 2. Staffing Profile and Professional Development

Academic, non-academic, administrative and technical staff are suitably experienced and qualified to support students in achieving the learning outcomes and the programme/ course objectives.

Applicable MFHEA Internal Quality Assurance Standards

Standard 1. Policy for Quality Assurance
Standard 3. Design and approval of programmes
Standard 4. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment
Standard 6. Teaching Staff
Standard 7. Learning resources and student support
Standard 10. Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes

Indicators for all FHEI institutions

1. The institutions should have a key managerial post or a unit dedicated to the management of online and blended learning from an educational perspective, separate from other roles such as the Data Protection Officer (DPO).
2. Faculty should be involved in the design of the programmes/ courses.
3. Relevant continuous professional development should be regular and mandatory, the frequency being decided by the exigencies of the institution and the needs of its faculty.
4. Academic staff should have suitable qualifications and experience in online and blended learning. Experience should cover not only the successful delivery of online and blended learning but also a record of positive relationships with students in such learning environments taking into consideration ethical online communication (netiquette).
5. Both academic staff and technical staff appreciate both the pedagogical and technical aspects of online and blended learning.
6. Both academic staff and technical staff understand the ethical implications of their actions, whether online or off-line, at all times.

Further guidance for small FHEI institutions

i. A key managerial post or unit is necessary. In the case of a small organisation it is more likely the responsibility will be carried by just one person but make sure that the person has the necessary qualifications and experience in online and blended learning. This recruitment should be done first before investing in any technology and the appointed person/s should be involved in the drawing up of the strategic and policy documents.
ii. Cyclical reviews with outsiders from organisation can sometimes lead to talent spotting and head-hunting.
iii. The institutions needs to keep up to date with the latest education and technology trends, though it should be careful not to rush into any changes without adequate assessment and planning.
iv. EU institutions provide regular funding to promote best practice, research and innovation in education and online learning. Institutions should consider tapping into these EU co-funding opportunities for research, capacity building and institutional development.
v. Though academic staff are usually the first to provide technical support to their students, academic staff should not provide technical support that takes away precious time from their primary role even if they are technically very knowledgable.
vi. Most of the academic staff will probably be part-timers. It is important to keep these educators well informed about the institution's endevours and where possible them provide relevant professional development. Retaining talent is key to the successful implementation of online and blended learning as the demand may exceed the supply of suitably qualified and experienced candiates.

Supporting resources

- Continuous professional development on education leadership in e-learning is available and some of it is free of charge. One such example with a European outlook is FutureLearn: https://www.futurelearn.com/subjects/teaching-courses . Most of the time these take the form of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCS). Apart from FutureLearn, other popular MOOC providers include Coursera, Edex and Udemy. Class Central (https://www.classcentral.com/) has many resources on MOOCs.
- Some news and trends sites: https://www.insidehighered.com/ https://www.tes.com/international Malta Review of Educational Research (University of Malta) www.mreronline.org

Domain 3. Review and Improvement

All programmes and courses, as well staff and student performance, are cyclically reviewed through data analysis and feedback collection from partners and stakeholders, especially students.

Applicable MFHEA Internal Quality Assurance Standards

Standard 1. Policy for Quality Assurance
Standard 3. Design and approval of programmes
Standard 8. Information Management
Standard 10. Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes
Standard 11. Cyclical external quality assurance

Indicators for all FHEI institutions

1. Cyclical review and improvement processes need to include online and blended learning.
2. Online and blended learning are audited through established quality assurance models that would have been adapted to these new pedagogical and methodological approaches.
3. Strategic and policy documents specifically mention quality online and blended courses.
4. The internal quality assurance policy covers online and blended delivery as a routine implementation.
5. Adequate cyclical reviews of online and blended programmes/courses should be a whole-of-institution approach and include academics, non-academics, students, partners and stakeholders (internal and external as necessary).
6. All staff needs to be aware of the applicable rules, regulations, policies and guidelines regarding cyclical programme and course reviews.
7. The digital tools used, e.g. the VLE, LMS, communication tools, and resources, leave a digital footprint. All this data should be analysed and included in the review process, with full respect of data protection regulations. A specific person or unit within the institution should be delegated to collect and analyse the data.
8. Students and academics should be encouraged to provide feedback in all the stages of programme and course implementation.
9. Reviewing and improving programmes and courses create a set of challenges to institutions: these could be realted to structure (leadership, management); resources (both human and material); expertise (pedagogy, course design, IT, quality assurance); and culture (mindset, leadership, quality, integrity). Institutions should take small but regular steps towards achieving successful reviews, making use of their resources without out-stretching them.
10. Technology should enable change, not drive it. The primary business case in any FHEI institution should be presented in the name of teaching, learning, and assessment. Most technologies used today, with a few exceptions, are not developed with educational affordances by design but are adopted, with varying degrees of success, in education.

Further guidance for small FHEI institutions

i. Although there are limited full-time human resources, the person/unit delegated with internal quality assurances should not be part of management to avoid conflict of interest.

Supporting resources

- Digital tools like online survey management can support the collection of feedback and analysis. Some of these like Google Forms and Microsoft Forms are free of charge. Moodle has built-in feedback and polling tools.
- VLEs like Moodle (www.moodle.org) have in-built data reporting and analysis tools. More tools can be connected through downloadable plug-ins. Always ask IT vendors about the requirement to have data collection and analytics functions in software and services used by the institution.

Domain 4. Resources

Technology is adopted to provide the necessary digital tools and infrastructure to enable the realisation of the educational programmes and courses that truly exploit the affordances of online and blended learning.

Applicable MFHEA Internal Quality Assurance Standards

Standard 1. Policy for Quality Assurance
Standard 4. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment
Standard 7. Learning resources and student support
Standard 8. Information Management

Indicators for all FHEI institutions

1. Online learning is more than just uploading resources online for students to access independently. That would qualify as web-enhanced learning. Relevant online resources should contribute to the creation of real engagement between the tutors and the students. If the instructor provides direct support through a virtual communication system such as a forum, a live video session, email, pre-recorded videos can also be considered contact hours.
2. Financial budgets should cater adequtely for the technical infrastructure and systems for online and blended delivery needed to achieve the learning outcomes set in the courses and the objectives of the programmes.
3. Teaching, learning, and assessment should be closely aligned and provide the business case for the investment in digital, material and human resources. It should not be a case of using technology for the sake of it or for publicity purposes.
4. Before investing in an online examination proctoring system the institution should analyse whether examinations are still the best form of assessment for online learning.
5. There should be clear policies that cover such issues as recording of lectures and meetings, acceptable use, security, data protection, and intellectual property. The institution should make sure these are updated and all staff and students are aware of them.
6. Resources should be developed and shared across faculty with full respect for intellectual property.
7. Any third-party digital resources purchased by the institution should be a) scalable (expanded or upgraded to cater for an increased demand), b) avoid vendor-lock-in (by using established standards) and c) be covered by a service-level agreement for maintenance and support by the vendor.
8. Many resources are available online through the web browser rather than as downloadable software that is installed on individual computing devices. These include productivity software such as Microsoft Office and Google Docs, multimedia editing and e-mail communication. This makes the acquisition and maintenance of resources easier but it also requires robust Internet access.
9. Faculty and students should be able to access most of the administrative and academic resources online without the need of being physically on campus.
10. Students should be able to access digital resources without the need to invest in high-end and expensive hardware and software. Resources should be accessible on computing devices (both traditional laptops / desktops and smaller mobile devices likes smartphones and tablets) with average specifications.
11. There should be a clear distinction between information for the general public and information and/ or resources for faculty and students.
12. Prospective students should be able to access relevant information online to make a pondered decision on enrollment. The web and social media are ideal for this purpose.
13. All resources used by the institution should comply with internationally recognized web accessibility standards (see below in supporting resources).

Further guidance for small FHEI institutions

i. It is easier to manage modular, off-the-shelf, well-supported, and cloud-based software solutions. Institutions are advised to pay attention to licencing fees, whether based on seats/users, by time, by volume of data handled etc. They are advised to outsource and use the cloud as infrastructure.

ii. The institution should encourage the 'Bring Your Own Device' principle to faculty and students to avoid investing in a computer infrastructure but rather concentrate on providing good on-campus Internet access over wi-fi and ethernet. This is to be complemented by the the necessary rules, regulations and policies to established safe, secure and meaningful use of the technology while minimising the risk of malware and illegal practice such as cyberbullying.

Supporting Resources

- Major technology providers give significant discounts or free services to registered educational institutions. One such company is Google with its Workspace (formerly Google Apps or GSuite) which provides a total communication and productivity solution. Microsoft also has discounted educational solutions and some of them are even free under the umbrella of Office 365.
- The quantity and quality of free digital resources is increasing on the Internet. These include Open Educational Resources (OER), Open Access Journals (OAJ), Free and Open Sources Software (FOSS), and Creative Commons Licensing. Libre Office is a productivity suite similar to Microsoft Office that is available free of charge. Original artworks such as images, videos and graphics with a Creative Commons Licence can be used for free.
- Open Access Journals are increasing in popularity but most of the top journals are still available against payment and subcribing to them can be beyond the financial means of smaller institutions. Google Scholar (https://scholar.google.com/) is an excellent search engine for academic publications and most of them are free to download.
- Web accessibility standards by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/.

Domain 5. Student Information and Experience

The institution provides a holistic student experience that enables students to enjoy a meaningful social environment while performing academically at their best through constant two-way communication, monitoring, and feedback loops.

Applicable Internal Quality Assurance Standards

Standard 1. Policy for Quality Assurance
Standard 3. Design and approval of programmes
Standard 4. Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment
Standard 5. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification
Standard 7. Learning Resources and Student Support
Standard 8. Information Management

Indicators for All FHEI Institutions

1. Faculty are presented with an orientation session on support mechanisms for students including tracking student participation and engagement in online courses and guiding students to support units in case of challenges.
2. Learning Management Systems such as Moodle provide activity log data about students' access to material and tasks. Data and learning analytics gathered from Learning Management Systems should be checked and analyzed to identify students who are lagging on online tasks and participation. This data assists the institution in identifying students who are at risk of dropping out early on.
3. Online surveys are administered to elicit feedback from students at different stages of their academic journey providing feedback that the institution can act upon to improve its services.
4. Policies on how and when to support students at risk of failure are provided.
5. Information on who to contact and where to seek technical support (access to the Learning Management System (LMS), Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), access to email, access to proctoring systems and access to learning resources) is presented to students on the institutions website, on course syllabi and course LMS. When possible, a chat room option is also provided to students on the website.
6. Educational support to students is provided for online learning skills such as time management, online communication, language support, and others. Guidelines on where and who to contact to seek this support are presented to students on the institution's website, on course syllabi and/or course LMS.
7. Students should receive the necessary orientation on the use of the support services (educational, technical, and counseling) provided by the institution and how they can be accessed online and offline.
8. Support hours for students are provided synchronously (phone, video conference, chat) during working hours and asynchronously (24/7 email) during periods of peak demand such as evenings, weekends and holidays.
9. Accessibility measures are taken into consideration in the design of online courses to cater to students who are physically challenged.
10. Blended programmes include clear instructions regarding face-to-face and online sessions or synchronous and asynchronous sessions. These sessions must be clearly stated in the scheme of work (SOW).
11. The design of the programmes, courses and study units put the learner at the centre of learning, teaching and assessment. Online learning design should not adopt the traditional 'stage on a stage' and 'chalk-and-talk' that used to work in face-to-face environments but develop online activities that exploit active, constructive, cooperative, authentic, and relevant for student-to-tutor and student-to-student interaction. Tutors should receive the necessary training and support on developing and implementing these pedagogies.

12. The institution's policies, rules, regulations and procedures should include the student's experience in online and blended learning. The responsibilities of academic staff, the administrative staff, the non-academic staff and the students should be clearly defined to support the development of a positive student experience.
13. Where possible, academic resources to students should be provided in digital format and easily accessible on computing devices with average specifications while taking into consideration intellectual property rights and procedures.
14. A VLE or an online learning platform could provide both academic-oriented and socially oriented engagement, with a clear distinction between the two. The latter will help students to have a more positive experience.

Further Guidelines for Small Institutions:

i. Academic and administrative staff should have the necessary training to identify students who have issues with their experience and refer them to suitably qualified human resources outside the institution if these are not available internally. When support on campus is not available, institutions may use free online tutorials, webinars, and resources to support students academically and technically.
ii. Given the limited human resource of small institutions, channels for synchronous communication with students such as live chat or audio/video conferencing can remain open during office/business hours. Asynchronous communication such as email can be used at other times.

Supporting Resources

- Tracking student progress in online courses (learning analytics): https://www.graspway.com/en/what-is-learning-analytics-and-how-do-i-apply-it-to-my-courses/
- Accessibility considerations in online courses for students with special needs: https://canvas.ucdavis.edu/courses/34528/pages/accessibility-for-online-courses#:~:text=An%20accessible%20online%20course%20enables,universities%20to%20make%20courses%20accessible.
- A list of webinars to support online learning: https://www.fenews.co.uk/press-releases/44278-free-webinars-to-support-online-learning-in-a-time-of-crisis
- Student support services for online learning: https://teachonline.ca/sites/default/files/tools-trends/insights/pdf/student_support_services_for_online_learning_re-imagined_and_re-invigorated.pdf
- It is relatively easy and without any financial outlays to create online surveys with such free tools as Google Forms and Microsoft Forms. Other online survey tools like SurveyMonkey provide limited free options and paid plans with advanced data collection and analysis.
- Popular social media like Facebook can be used to support the student experience. However, such use in an academic environment should be regulated by the institution's policies.

Domain 6. Assessment and Integrity

Policies about online assessment and integrity are clearly communicated to students and administered effectively to reflect students' achievement of the learning outcomes.

Applicable Internal Quality Assurance Standards:
Standard 1. Policy for Quality Assurance
Standard 4. Student-centred teaching, learning and assessment.

Indicators for All FHEI Institutions

1. Online assessments are aligned with and mapped against programme and course learning outcomes.
2. A variety of assessment types are used to evaluate students' learning and the attainment of learning outcomes. These include online exams and performance assessments such as projects, research papers, presentations, etc.
3. Students are aware about the nature of online assessments and grading rubrics are provided in case of performance assessments.
4. Online proctoring systems are in place for online assessments that require confirmation of the identity of the test taker and the integrity of the test taker environment.
5. Online technologies are used effectively to assess students' learning. These could be as simple as Google Forms, Microsoft Forms, Moodle Quiz, etc. (More examples are shared under 'Supporting Resources').
6. Performance data shows online students' achievement. This data can be tracked via the Learning Management System or other grading tools.
7. A formal procedure for student complaints and appeals is in place.
8. Students are aware of plagiarism rules. They are listed on the institution's website and in the course syllabi/descriptions.
9. Students are trained how to appropriately paraphrase, cite, and reference both online and printed sources in their academic writing.
10. In blended courses, summative assessments (final exams) aside from performance assessments (research paper, project, etc.) are conducted on campus.

Further Guidelines for Small Institutions:

i. Assessments may be conducted on campus in cases of exams to reduce the cost of online proctoring systems. However, the institution should analyze whether online exams are the most suitable form of assessment.
ii. Resources such as the Purdue Online Writing Lab are provided to students as a guide to paraphrase cite and reference sources.

Supporting Resources

- Guide to online assessments: https://eclearn.emmanuel.edu/courses/1390874/pages/types-of-assessment?module_item_id=13057048
- Technologies for online assessment: https://www.edtechupdate.com/online-assessments/
- The challenges of online learning: Supporting and engaging the isolated learner: https://eprints.qut.edu.au/102750/1/293-749-1-PB.pdf
- Online proctoring systems: https://www.softwaresuggest.com/blog/best-online-exam-proctoring-software/
- An evaluation of online proctoring tools: https://search.informit.org/doi/pdf/10.3316/informit.620366163696963

Domain 7. Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes of online programmes are equivalent to Learning outcomes of face to face (f2f) programmes and there is an evidence of their assessment.

Applicable Internal Quality Assurance Standards:
Standard 1. Policy for Quality Assurance
Standard 4. Student-centred teaching, learning, and assessment

Indicators for All FHEI Institutions:
1. The course syllabi demonstrate an alignment between Programme Learning Outcomes (PLOs).
2. Course content and assessments are aligned with the PLOs.
3. Evidence of students' achievement of the PLOs is available through performance data.
4. Face-to-face programmes that are delivered online need a total review on the design of the learning outcomes, their delivery and assessment, and it should include a reference to pedagogies that enhance student interaction and gauge student learning.
5. A comparison between the performance of students in face to face, blended, and online programmes is available.
6. Follow-up graduate and employee surveys demonstrate achieved learning outcomes.
7. Benchmarking PLOs with other external programmes is undertaken to ensure that they cover the most current needs in the field.
8. PLOs reflect skills needed in the current digital age such as 21st Century Skills and other skills required by the workplace.

Further Guidelines for Small Institutions:
i. The most difficult aspect of learning outcomes is aligning them with the Malta Qualifications Framework rather than their achievement through teaching and learning. Institutions should make sure the learning outcomes are properly aligned with the MQF and that they do not require human and material resources that the institutions do not possess or cannot acquire.
ii. Although examinations are a popular method of assessment in face-to-face setting, current educational theory is emphasizing performance and formative assessment rather than summative (examinations) assessment.

Supporting Resources:
- Curriculum mapping: https://www.uis.edu/assessment/curriculum-mapping-examples/ ; https://champlain.instructure.com/courses/200147/pages/curriculum-mapping
- Programme Benchmarking: https://policy.federation.edu.au/learning_and_teaching/academic_programs_and_courses/benchmarking/higher_ducation_benchmarking/ch02.php

Domain 8. Curriculum Design

Curriculum design includes learning experiences that ensure students' achievement of the programme learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated and refer to the correct level of the Malta Qualifications Framework.

Applicable Internal Quality Assurance Standards:
Standard 3. Design and approval of programmes
Standard 4. Student-centred teaching, learning and assessment.
Standard 10. Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes.

Indicators for All FHEI Institutions:

1. Pedagogical practices are evident in the design of curricula, demonstrating innovative practices such as project-based learning, simulations, internships, work-based learning and case-based learning.
2. Teaching staff who are involved in developing and evaluating online and blended programmes have proper training in online learning design.
3. Administrators involved in designing/developing/evaluating online programmes have expertise in academic and technical aspects.
4. The curriculum reflects real-world exigencies and scenarios, providing students with a qualification/training that can be easily applied. The curriculum is reviewed by external experts and feedback is implemented in the design whenever needed.
5. Student feedback regarding programmes and courses is taken into consideration and integrated in programme revisions and courses.
6. Periodic programme review is indicated and conducted based on a set policy.

Further Guidelines for Small Institutions:

i. With limited human resources, the design of the first online programmes and courses in an institution can be daunting. External support is paramount. However, the institution should invest in training of in-house HR to create internal capacity in this important aspect.

Supporting Resources

- Curriculum mapping: https://www.uis.edu/assessment/curriculum-mapping-examples/ ; https://champlain.instructure.com/courses/200147/pages/curriculum-mapping
- Programme Benchmarking: https://policy.federation.edu.au/learning_and_teaching/academic_programs_and_courses/benchmarking/higher_ducation_benchmarking/ch02.php
- MFHEA has guidelines for external quality assurance that covers several aspects that need to be addressed at programme/course design stage.

Appendix A - Definitions

*Adapted from NCFHE Communication 09/2020 where there is the full glossary.

Asynchronous Learning

Learning that occurs when the educator and the learners are not communicating and engaging in real time - More commonly known as self-study.

Synchronous Learning

When the educator and the learners engage in real time through web-conferencing tools such as Zoom, Teams, WebEx, etc.

Distance Learning/ Online Learning

Also known as e-learning or online learning, it is a form of education in which teachers and students are physically separated. Communication between the educator and the learner occurs via telecommunication or such services as mail. In the 21st century the term has been replaced by e-learning as almost all distance learning is being based on electronic communication such as the internet. This electronic communication needs to lead to learning based on pedagogical principles to be accepted as learning, otherwise it is simply a means of communication. E.g., email correspondence between a supervisor and learner doing research is not e-learning but simple communication using the Internet. However, a video/audio conference call between the two to discuss research methods and provide feedback does constitute e-learning over distance.

Blended Learning

A formal education programme in which learners engage at least in part through online delivery of content and instruction with some element of learner control over time, place, path and/or pace, and at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location with face-to-face interaction away from home. The ratio between online and face-to-face learning is decided by the educator and/or the programme on the basis of the related pedagogical principles and the programme's requirements but both modes are complementary in the programme.

Learning Analytics

Learning analytics is the measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of data about learners and their contexts, for the purposes of understanding and optimizing learning and the environments in which it occurs.

Learning Management System

A software application or web-based technology used to organise and administer courses and programme, with the core functions being enrollment, student administration, performance tracking and data archiving. It may also have other secondary functions like the delivery of courses and assessment that are the core of the Virtual Learning Environment.

Open Educational Resources

Teaching and educational resources that are openly licensed and available free of charge.

Web-enhanced Learning

Teaching and learning that makes use of the World Wide Web (Internet), to support face-to-face learning to create opportunities for online collaboration and the executing of tasks that lead to learning. This includes giving learners the opportunity to instructional watch videos online, research websites and access other resources on the World Wide Web that provides learners with another opportunity to enhance their learning with traditional non-digital means such as reading printed texts.

Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)

A software application or web-based technology used to plan, implement and assess a learning process, allowing a teacher to create and deliver content, monitor student participation, and assess student performance. Also referred to-as Learning Management System (LMS).

Scheme of Work

A schedule of work that plans the deliver of the coursework, complete with deadlines and when/how the learning outcomes will be achieved.

Further Education Institutions

All non-compulsory formal, non-formal and informal learning serves to obtain a national qualification classified up to and including level 4 of the Malta Qualifications Framework, or a foreign qualification at a comparable level.

Higher Education Institutions

All non-compulsory formal, non-formal, and informal learning or research serves to obtain a national qualification classified at level 5 of the Malta Qualifications Framework or higher or a foreign qualification at a comparable level.

Malta Qualifications Framework

The Malta Qualifications Framework is also a referencing tool that helps to describe and compare both national and foreign qualifications to promote quality, transparency and mobility of qualifications in all types of education. It is mainly referenced to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) as well as to other non-European qualifications frameworks.

Notes

GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE – FOR ONLINE LEARNING PROVIDERS IN MALTA

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