

MFHEA COMMUNICATION

MFHEA/06/2024

Title: Notice of Evaluation Fees and Process for Digital Platform and Online/Blended Programmes

From: Head of Accreditation, Validation and Quality Assurance, MFHEA

Date: 08.05.2024

Dear Esteemed Providers,

We hope this letter finds you well. As part of our ongoing commitment to ensuring quality assurance in digital education platforms and online/blended programmes, we would like to inform you of updates regarding our evaluation process and associated fees.

Effective from **1st July 2024**, an increase to the current fee structure will come into effect:

Further Education Institutions	Evaluation of a Digital Platform	€400
Higher Education Institutions	Evaluation of a Digital Platform	€500
Further and Higher Education Institutions	Evaluation of a Digital Platform	€500
Further Education Institutions Higher Education Institutions Further and Higher Education Institution	Evaluation of provision of online/blended programmes*	15% in addition to the total cost of the programme .

*Already License Providers kindly refer to Annex 1 – Application Process for Provision of Online/Blended.

To ensure thorough evaluation, each assessment will involve **two evaluators**. It's important to note that the **maximum number of evaluation cycles allowed is three**.

In the spirit of transparency and fairness, **we have implemented a process where providers will be informed of the names of the evaluators assigned to their assessment**. Upon receipt of this information, providers will have three days to raise any objections they may have regarding the assigned evaluators. If objections are raised, the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) will review the concerns and make a final decision on the evaluators.

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This process aims to uphold the integrity of our evaluation procedures while providing an opportunity for providers to voice any concerns they may have regarding the evaluation process.

If you have any questions or require further clarification regarding these changes, please do not hesitate to contact us. We value your partnership and look forward to continuing to work together to maintain the quality standards of digital education.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,
Mr Lawrence Azzopardi
Head of Accreditation, Validation and Quality Assurance

Annex 1. Application Process for Provision to Online/Blended

If an licensed provider would like to introduce online/blended learning, they would need to provide MFHEA with the following:

The programmes must satisfy the following criteria for the provision to be classified as “100% online or blended”:

1. The learning process is directed and supervised by at least one suitably qualified and competent tutor; and
2. Students have the freedom and flexibility to access the course at a time which is most convenient to them (student control) in addition to the engagement required with the tutor as stipulated by the course description;
3. An integral part of the programme or the whole programme should utilise pedagogical methods which deliver new skills, knowledge, and competences to students through a virtual learning environment.

Furthermore, all providers that are intending to deliver an online/blended course should kindly note the need to provide the following:

- A completed update license application including the completion of Section N (refer to the below).
- Access to online platform and Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) both as a student and as a lecturer.
- Any contractual agreement you may have with the hosts/owners of the online platform (if applicable).
- At least one programme which is going to be delivered online/blended. If you are going to apply such amendments to an already accredited programme, please do so with track changes. Kindly refer to the current [fee structure for the programme accreditation](#).

Section N: Fully Online/Blended Provision

All education institutions that wish to provide online/blended learning as part of their education institution must fill in this section of the application form. Further and Higher Education providers who want to provide online learning and blended learning need to comply with the following criteria and submit the requested information at licence and/or programme accreditation stage. The criteria and required information are mapped to the [Guidelines for Quality Assurance for Online Learning Providers in Malta](#) by the MFHEA which became regulation on 1st October 2022.

The information requested for Part A should be available in the documentation submitted for the provider as part of the accreditation process or made available in this form. The Supplementary Information in Part B can be provided in this form and complements the information in Part A.

The MFHEA reserves the right to ask the applicant for further information as necessary.

PART A - THE EIGHT DOMAINS OF THE GUIDELINES

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.

Domain 2. Staffing Profile and Professional Development

- a) The institution 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.

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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. 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) 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 in-vestment 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 analytics 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 counselling).

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- 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.

Domain 7. Learning Outcomes

- a) Face-to-face programmes that are delivered online need a total review on the design of the learning out-comes, their delivery and assessment, and it should include a reference to pedagogies that enhance student interaction and gauge student learning

Domain 8. Curriculum Design

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

PART B - SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

1. VLE: Name of VLE, the URL of the VLE, and guest access for MFHEA's reviewers
2. VLE: Reasons for choosing the particular type and brand of VLE
3. VLE: Automated back-up systems for content and data (redundancy and business continuity)
4. INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCING: Please state the type of resources that will be made available to tutors and students, including resources which are both in virtual and physical format. How will the quality of the resources be ensured?
5. ADMISSION: What are the administrative processes for students' admissions and their authentication in the virtual learning environment? How is the identity of the students checked when they submit their coursework, engage in virtual communication, or sit for online assessments?
6. EDUCATOR SUPPORT: How do tutors receive academic, administrative and technical support on the provision of the programme both physically and in the virtual learning environment?
7. STUDENT SUPPORT: How will you provide technical, administrative and academic support to students in a virtual or blended environment?
8. ACCESS: What technical resources are needed by tutors and students to access the virtual learning environment and engage in teaching and learning?
9. INTERACTION AND COMMUNICATION: How do students and tutors interact with each other? Please explain with reference to virtual learning or both virtual and traditional in case of a blended provision.
10. INTERACTION AND COMMUNICATION: How is data on students' interaction in the virtual learning environment going to be collected and used for the development of both the programme and virtual learning environment?
11. ARCHIVING: Indicate how records (including students' records, assignments, assessments, employment rates and career paths when the course states an orientation towards employment etc.) are going to be archived in Malta.
12. SECURITY AND PRIVACY: Provide your mechanisms for student security and privacy both online and offline