QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

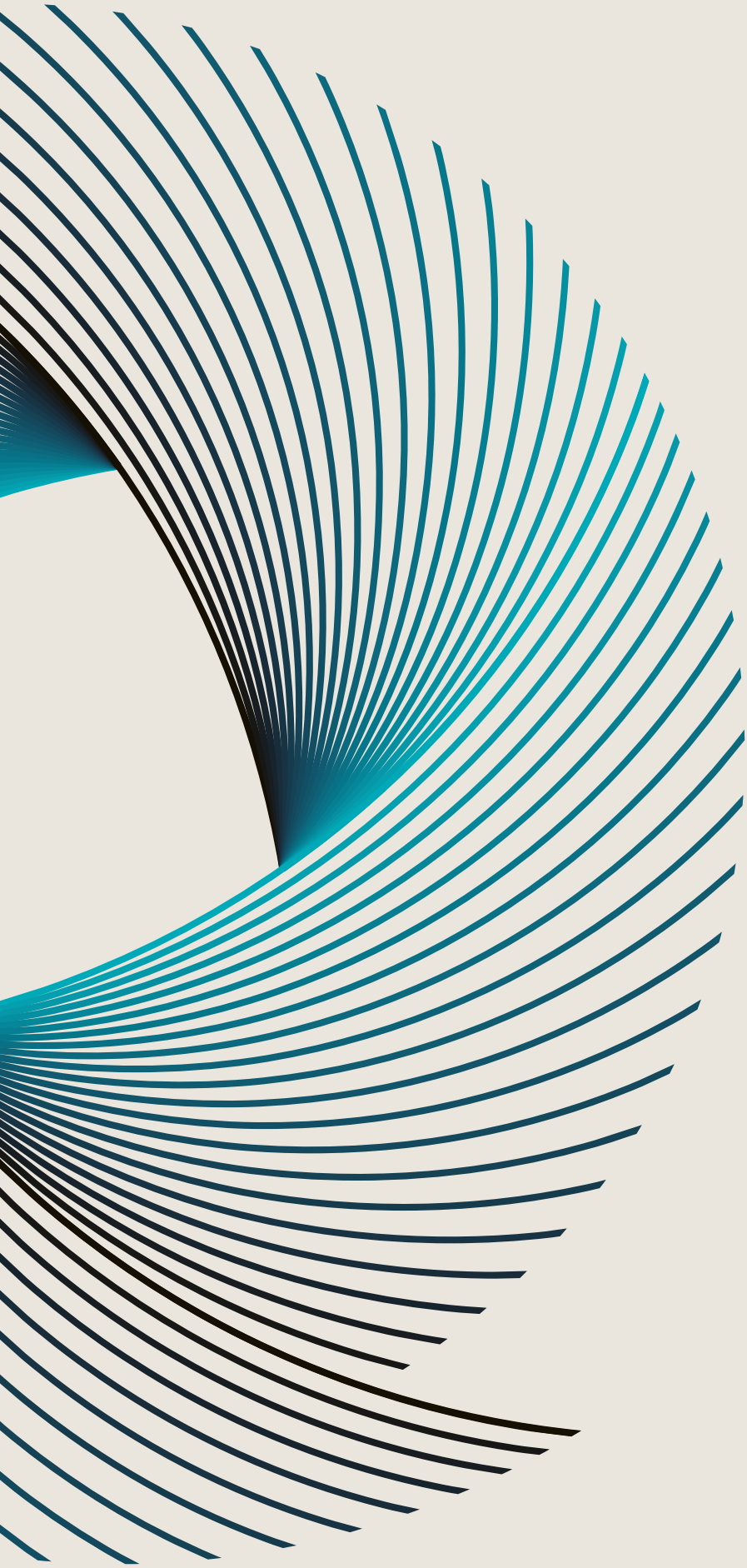
Topic Specific

Blended, Hybrid and Online Programmes

Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines

For Providers of Programmes Supported by Digital Education

March 2023/V2 © QQI



QQI, an integrated agency for quality and qualifications in Ireland

March 2023/V2 © QQI

Topic Specific

Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines

FOR PROVIDERS OF PROGRAMMES SUPPORTED BY DIGITAL EDUCATION

Section	Title	Page
	Glossary of Key Terms	**6**
Section 1:	**Introduction and Context**	**7**
1	**Introduction**	**7**
1.1	Why do we need these guidelines?	
1.2	What is digital education?	
1.3	To whom do these guidelines apply?	
1.4	What is the purpose, scope and relevance?	
2	**Context**	**12**
2.1	How is the education landscape changing?	
2.2	What are the common features of blended learning programmes?	
2.3	What are the common features of online learning programmes?	
2.4	Why guidelines rather than minimum standards?	
Section 2:	**The Guidelines**	**15**
3	**Structure**	**15**
3.1	How are the guidelines structured?	
3.2	How are additional quality considerations for online programmes shown?	
4	**Domains and Procedures**	**17**
4.1	Organisational context	

- Strategy, management and implementation plans
- Finance, infrastructure and resources
- Policies, regulations and administrative processes
- Strategic partners and collaboration
- Learners outside Ireland

4.2 Programme context

- Programme outcomes
- Approval and programme validation processes
- Learning and curriculum design
- Learning resources and materials
- Assessment and feedback practices
- Evaluation and continuous improvement

4.3 Learner Experience Context

- Thinking about study
- Learning support and development
- Equality of opportunity
- Learning experience and outcomes

Section 3: Implementation **50**

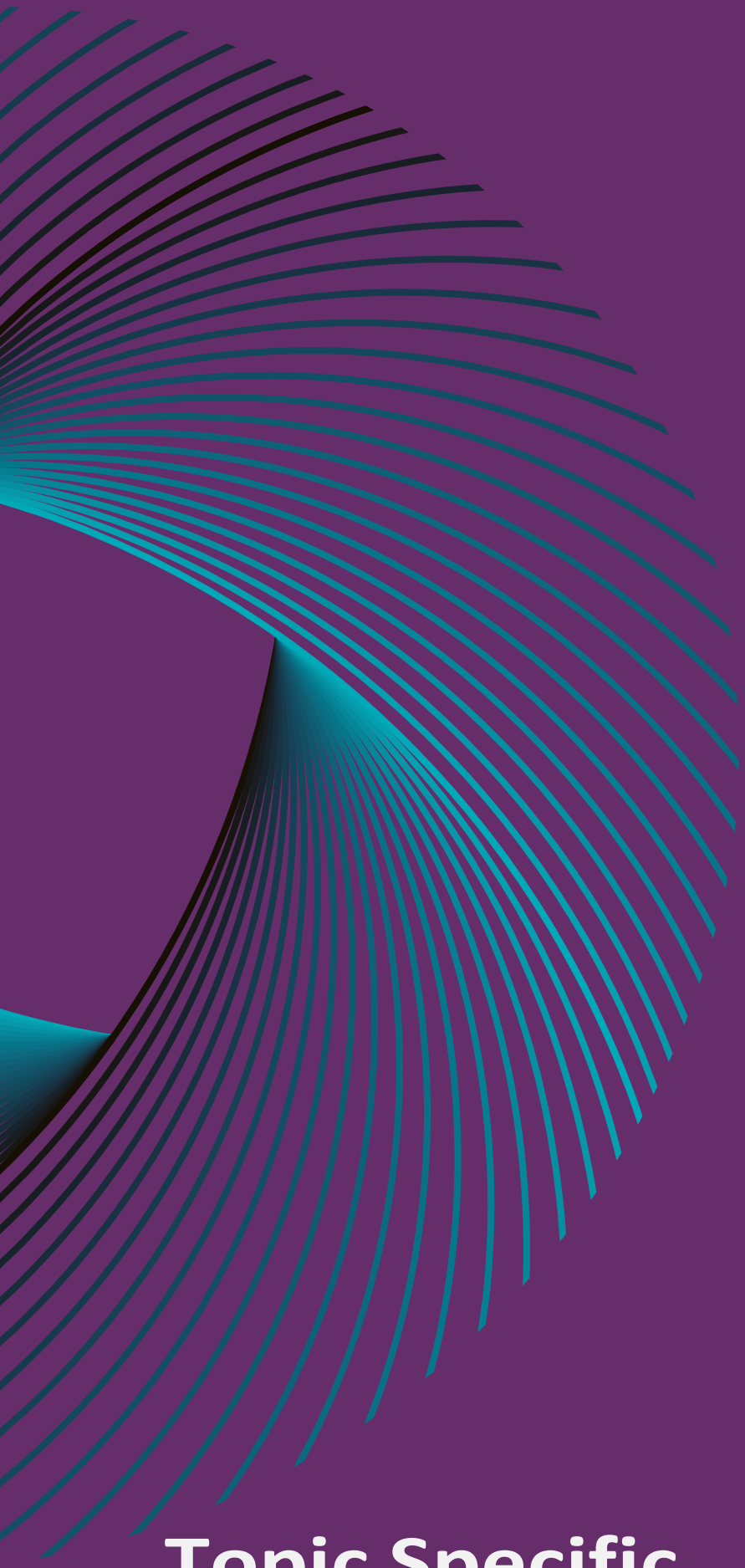
5 Applying the Guidelines

5.1 How can providers use these guidelines?
5.2 How might different providers use the guidelines?
5.3 How can providers document evidence of their good practice?

6 Appendix **52**

6.1 How were the guidelines developed?
6.2 How could providers report on the guidelines?

DRAFT



Topic Specific

GLOSSARY: KEY TERMS

Artificial Intelligence	There is no simple definition but generally refers to machine-based systems that can, given a set of human-defined objectives, generate content, make predictions, recommendations, or decisions that influence real or virtual environments.
Augmented Reality	An enhanced version of the real physical world that is achieved through the use of digital visual elements, sound, or other sensory stimuli and delivered via technology.
Asynchronous Online Learning	Learners accessing online materials at their own pace and interacting with their teacher and peers other over longer periods.
Blended Learning	A type of education where all direct teaching takes place in-person and is blended with and enhanced by online materials and activities and asynchronous interactions.
Digital Education	Digital education is a broad umbrella term which encompasses the concepts and modalities of blended, hybrid and online learning.
Electronic Proctoring	A platform that enables learners can sit online tests and exams using their own computer or one provided for them on a secure browser and webcam where their behaviour is monitored and recorded.
Eportfolio	A platform that allows a collection of work (evidence) to be stored in an electronic format to demonstrate and showcases learning over time.
Hybrid Learning	A type of education where direct teaching occurs using a mix of online and on-campus instruction, with the online components taking place synchronously, asynchronously, or in combination.
Learning Management System	The core platform or infrastructure most large providers use to support online learning experiences (e.g., Blackboard, Canvas, Moodle, etc.)
Learning Resources	Includes both a print and digital materials and may include text, audio, video, animations, simulations and other types of rich media content designed for learning.
Online Learning	A type of education where all direct teaching occurs online, either synchronously or asynchronously, or in combination.
Open Educational Resources	Digital materials in any format and medium that reside in the public domain or are under copyright that have been released under an open license, that permit no-cost access, re-use, re-purpose, adaptation and redistribution.
Student Information System	A platform that enables educational providers to digitise and consequently manage learner information and track and record progress more efficiently usually with interoperability to other systems.
Synchronous Online Learning	Teachers and learners gathering at the same time and virtual place and interacting in “real-time”
Video Conferencing Platform	A tool that facilitates online communication for synchronous video and audio meetings and live online classes (e.g., Teams, Zoom, etc.).
Virtual Learning Environment	A term used to describe the wider digital learning ecosystem of tools and platforms used for learning and that support the LMS.
Virtual Reality	A simulated experience that employs pose tracking and 3D near-eye displays to give the learner an immersive feel of a virtual world

DRAFT

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

1 INTRODUCTION

This document outlines quality assurance (QA) guidelines established by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) for all providers of programmes supported by digital education. These guidelines are "statutory" guidelines: QQI must publish QA guidelines under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012 (referred to as the 2012 Act in this document). The 2012 Act further requires providers to "have regard to" QQI's quality assurance (QA) guidelines when establishing their own quality assurance procedures.

These guidelines update and replace those first published in 2018 for blended learning programmes and supplement the QQI *Core Statutory QA Guidelines* published in April 2016. While the *Core Guidelines* provide the general quality assurance guidance required, the guidelines in this document address the specific responsibilities of providers regarding the QA of programmes supported by digital education and related study modes. Providers of blended, hybrid and online learning programmes as defined in these guidelines should also refer to QQI's other sector-specific and topic-specific QA guidelines as appropriate.

> These guidelines should be read in conjunction with QQI's policy on QA Guidelines. As topic-specific QA guidelines, they supplement and are in addition to the core QA guidelines. They aim to support providers in assuring quality, establishing internal QA procedures, and undertaking quality reviews and continuous improvements.

1.1 Why do we need these guidelines?

The growth of digital education continues to challenge many traditional approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. New digital technologies offer providers and teachers with more choices about how they design the curriculum, interact with learners, and develop learning materials. Similarly, learners are expecting greater flexibility over the way they study. There is a growing worldwide trend towards more part-time online learners[1]. Accordingly, providers are responding to increasing demand for flexibility by redesigning existing programmes and developing new blended, hybrid and online learning programmes, including the provision of micro-credentials. While such flexible programmes support upskilling and create a more diverse range of lifelong learning pathways, the growth of digital education raises additional quality considerations. These guidelines are constructed to help providers identify what they need to consider and how they should respond to the changing digital environment. A central rationale for the guidelines is the need to ensure a quality experience for learners as providers seek to harness the potential of new digital education models.

1.2 What is digital education?

The term 'digital education' has particular significance in the European context. The *Digital Education Action Plan (2020-2027),* launched by European Commission (2020)[2], sets out a common vision of high-quality, inclusive and accessible digital education in Europe. It has two main priorities:

[1] World Economic Forum (2022). *These 3 charts show the global growth in online learning*. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/01/online-learning-courses-reskill-skills-gap/

[2] European Commission. (2020). *Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027).* https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/digital-education/action-plan

- Fostering the development of a high-performing digital education ecosystem
- Enhancing digital skills and competences for the digital transformation

In 2022, the European Commission launched the *European Digital Education Hub*[3] to support educators throughout Europe across all levels to harness the potential of new digital technologies. Supporting teaching and learning in a digital world is also a key strategic priority of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (2019)[4]. A strong emphasis is placed on supporting those who learn, teach and lead to critically apply digital technologies with the goals of enhancing learning, teaching and overall digital capacity. Set against this wider backdrop, the term 'digital education' is adopted throughout these guidelines as a contemporary and broad umbrella concept which refers to three main types of programmes:

- Blended learning programmes
- Hybrid learning programmes
- Online learning programmes

The above nomenclature and the distinction between these terms is taken from a comprehensive global analysis of emerging quality standards, practices and supports for digital education published by the OECD (Staring, et al., 2022)[5]. While globally there is no single accepted definition of these terms and interpretations continue to vary in the literature (Singh & Thurman, 2019)[6], the OECD proposes the following three broad categories of digital education based on differences in time and location of instruction:

Key definitions

- *Online learning* refers to a type of education where all direct teaching occurs online, either synchronously or asynchronously, or in combination.
- *Hybrid learning* refers to a type of education where direct teaching occurs using a mix of online and on-campus instruction, with the online components taking place synchronously, asynchronously, or in combination.
- *Blended learning* refers to a type of education where all direct teaching takes place in-person and is blended with and enhanced by online materials and activities and asynchronous interactions.

While blended learning was originally defined by Garrison and Kanuka (2004)[7] as a general term referring to the blending of online and face-to-face teaching, the above categories recognise more contemporary developments, including the emergence of *hybrid* and *hyflex* models of education requiring a more nuanced distinction. In contrast to hybrid learning, the online components of blended learning in the above categories do not replace on-site face-to-face class time; instead, they supplement and build upon content discussed in the physical classroom. This subtle but important distinction adds to the difficulty of finding consensus in the nomenclature.

[3] European Digital Education Hub. https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/digital-education/action-plan/action-14-european-digital-education-hub

[4] National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. (2019). *Strategy 2019-2021 Leading Enhancement and Innovation in Teaching and Learning.* https://hub.teachingandlearning.ie/resource/strategy-2019-2021-leading-enhancement-and-innovation-in-teaching-and-learning/

[5] Staring, F., Brown, M., Bacsich, P., & Ifenthaler, D. (2022). Digital higher education: Emerging quality standards, practices and supports, *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 281, OECD Publishing, Paris. https://doi.org/10.1787/f622f257-en.

[6] Singh, V., & Thurman, A. (2019). How many ways can we define online learning? A systematic literature review of definitions of online learning (1988-2018). *American Journal of Distance Education*, *33*(4), 289–306.

[7] Garrison, D.R. & Kanuka, H. (2004). Blended Learning: Uncovering Its Transformative Potential in Higher Education. *Internet and Higher Education*, 7(2), 95-105, p. 96.

These guidelines navigate this challenging terrain by adopting a "big bucket" approach to digital education and its many variants, as proposed by Johnston, et al. (2022)[8] in their effort to resolve confusion in the literature. This approach acknowledges the complexity and increasing convergence of study modes but attempts to keep definitions as simple as possible.

Centred around the learner, there are two main categories that distinguish between the *primary* location of study: physically on-site or virtually off-site. A third intersecting category recognises that some learners may be engaged in a mix of on-site and off-site learning, either synchronously or asynchronously or a combination of both, in a hybrid manner consistent with the OECD categories. It follows that framed by these two contemporary efforts to broadly define digital education, the guidelines pertain to *blended, hybrid* and *online* learning programmes.

Importantly, the guidelines avoid more complex definition wars as they are largely unproductive, especially when providers may have their own operational definitions of the above terms. The key point is that the guidelines are designed to be relevant to all learning programmes supported by digital education – irrespective of the study mode. Although not every programme fits neatly into one of the three categories, as learners can study at a distance with no digital component or via a combination of online and print materials, and some courses are taught through more than one study mode, the guidelines are written to apply to a diverse mix of offerings. Hence, they pertain to the broad domain of digital education.

However, a key distinction appears throughout the guidelines as blended and hybrid learning programmes will always include an on-site face-to-face element, whereas online learning programmes can be completed entirely from a distance. In recognition of this distinction, the guidelines identify several additional quality considerations specific to online learning programmes where learners are physically separated from their teacher(s) and fellow learners. While learners studying at a distance may have the option to voluntarily meet in person, on-site, with peers or teachers, or make use of on-campus facilities, this is not normally required to complete their programme of study. Accordingly, the guidelines contain additional notes to indicate areas where online learning programmes need to address issues that may impact the quality of provision.

1.3 To whom do these guidelines apply?

These guidelines are applicable to all types of providers offering blended, hybrid and online learning programmes leading to awards recognised within the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). These include special purpose awards such as micro-credentials. They are produced for the attention of, and use by, providers establishing quality assurance procedures under the 2012 Act. The legal context varies between providers as follows:

- Previously established universities and the National University of Ireland (NUI) are recognised as autonomous and must have regard to QA guidelines in the development of their internal QA procedures.
- Other awarding bodies, namely the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI), the technological universities and institutes of technology, must have regard to the QA guidelines prior to the approval of their QA procedures by QQI.

[8] Johnson, N., Seaman, J., & Poulin, R. (2022). Defining different modes of learning: Resolving confusion and contention through consensus. *Online Learning Journal, 26(3),* 91-110.

- Education and Training Boards, SOLAS and Teagasc must have regard to the QA guidelines prior to the approval of their QA procedures by QQI.
- Independent or private providers of higher, further, and English language education programmes come voluntarily to QQI to seek approval of their QA procedures or access to QQI awards. Such providers must have regard to the QA guidelines prior to the approval of their QA procedures by QQI.
- Listed Awarding Bodies come voluntarily to QQI to seek inclusion of awards in their Framework and must have regard to QA guidelines in the development of their own QA procedures.
- Associated providers must have regard to these QA guidelines prior to approval of their QA procedures by a listed awarding body.
- Linked providers must have regard to these QA guidelines prior to the approval of their QA procedures by a designated awarding body.

As set out in the QQI *Core Statutory QA Guidelines*, quality assurance procedures include provision for engagement with external partnerships and second providers. Quality assurance procedures cover all such arrangements, including sub-contracting of provision, research or other partnerships in programme or research provision or related services both at home and abroad as appropriate. Providers of all blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes that are credit-bearing and/or contribute towards an award of QQI or another awarding body are required to have regard to these guidelines.

Providers offering programmes supported by digital education that is neither credit-bearing nor leading to an award recognised within the NFQ, are advised to be guided by the expectations and quality considerations captured here. This may mitigate the risk of reputational damage. Thus, these guidelines aim to support good practice and a positive experience when learning is supported by digital education, with quality assurance, improvement, and enhancement in place.

1.4 What is the purpose, scope and relevance?

These guidelines provide guidance to providers on the quality assurance and enhancement of blended, hybrid and online learning where learners, for part or all their programme of study, may be physically remote from:

- Other learners
- Teachers and assessors
- The provider institution
- Learning resources and support services

Providers will have regard to the guidelines to inform the establishment (including amendment) of their quality assurance procedures for digital education provision, as defined in this document. It is anticipated that such procedures will be proportionate to the nature, scale and complexity of their blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes or their future aspirations. This point recognises that not all the guidelines will be applicable to smaller providers, especially those with relatively few offerings supported by digital education.

DRAFT

These guidelines are to be used:

- By providers when establishing, developing, implementing, evaluating, maintaining, or reviewing quality assurance procedures for blended and hybrid programmes involving a combination of face-to-face and online learning.
- By providers when establishing, developing, implementing, evaluating, maintaining, or reviewing quality assurance procedures for online programmes involving learners who are physically separated from their teacher(s) and peers.
- As a basis for the approval by QQI of a provider's relevant QA procedures (other than previously established universities).

These guidelines are not intended:

- To prescribe ***how*** providers are to design, deliver and administer blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes or how they establish their internal QA procedures. Rather, providers are expected to have internal systems of quality assurance for programmes supported by digital education and related study modes that are appropriate to their individual contexts and include procedures to successfully monitor the effectiveness of those systems.

In so far as it is possible, these guidelines focus on what is distinctive in blended and hybrid learning contexts and what additional quality considerations apply to online learning programmes. The guidelines are the outcome of a comprehensive review of the European and international literature on quality assurance models and frameworks for digital education and incorporate many suggestions gathered through stakeholder consultation. Appendix 6.1 describes how guidelines were developed and some of the seminal literature that informs their design. To avoid confusion, the guidelines do not aim to replace any other QQI policy and guidance already available and generic to all teaching and learning or curriculum design – whatever the study mode. They should also be seen in the wider context of European and industry specific quality assurance requirements, and the *International Standards and Guidelines for for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education* specific to online and blended modalities, short learning programmes and cross-border education (International Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2022)[9].

[9] International Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education. (2022). *International Standards and Guidelines for for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education.* https://www.inqaahe.org/sites/default/files/INQAAHE-International-Standards-and-Guidelines-ISG.pdf

2 CONTEXT

These guidelines come at time of rapid change. Digital technology is continuing to transform many aspects of our daily lives. Informal ways of learning routinely involve using our mobile devices to search and locate relevant information on the Internet. Everyday millions of people worldwide have become accustomed to using social media as an important source of information. Artificial Intelligence (AI) applications are being seamlessly incorporated into many of these mobile technologies.

2.1 How is the education landscape changing?

Education is not immune to these changes. Over the years, MOOCs have attracted millions of learners to thousands of free online courses. Even before the global pandemic, new types of credit-bearing and non-credit bearing micro-credentials were being offered through major MOOC platforms. The COVID-19 crisis was a watershed moment for online learning, as providers rapidly pivoted to emergency remote teaching. This experience put a greater spotlight on the quality of online learning. Often lost in comparisons to traditional methods was an appreciation that online learning is not a single entity; it has many different variations—just as face-to-face teaching differs from large lectures to small tutorials and hands-on labs.

As already mentioned, the global pandemic added fuel to growing demand from learners for greater flexibility over the way they learn. Responding to this increasing demand adds further complexity to the learning design process, the most appropriate teaching approaches, the best types of study materials and related quality assurance procedures. For example, the practice of video recording lectures and short lessons has become increasingly common so that learners can view them at their own pace and place. However, a UK review of blended learning by the Office of Students (2022)[10] raises serious quality concerns about the accessibility of these recordings and wider questions concerning the currency and recycling of digital resources.

AI applications add another dimension to the changing landscape and the potential disruptive impact of digital transformation. While Educational Technology has a long history of hype, hope and disappointment, there are many new opportunities available to providers as well as genuine concerns about academic integrity, contract cheating, platform solutionism and the increasing role of digital technology in the human process of learning. Set against this changing environment, the guidelines balance the possibilities of new learning futures with some of the risks and additional quality considerations. Importantly, the underlying premise of these guidelines is that fundamentally the principles of a quality learning experience remain largely the same. However, a related premise is there are specific quality issues for blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes that providers need to consider beyond core QA requirements.

The focus, therefore, of the guidance provided here is on the quality assurance of provision and related services in the context of programmes supported by digital education. The expectation is that as with all types of programmes, regardless of study mode, providers will look for the most effective and efficient means to support learners in achieving intended learning outcomes. Often this will require a mix of different learning, teaching, and assessment strategies, especially if learners are studying online from a distance.

[10] Office of Students. (2022). *Blended learning and OfS regulation.* https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/blended-learning-and-ofs-regulation/

DRAFT

2.2 What are the common features of blended and hybrid learning programmes?

While blended and hybrid learning can take many forms, they share a common feature as both types of programmes, include an on-site, face-to-face component. The digital aspect of the learning experience may include:

- Face-to-face on-site tuition where teachers use digitally prepared presentations, class polls and other digital tools to engage learners.
- A Learning Management System (LMS) which forms the core of a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) designed to support online discussion, digital learning materials, tests and quizzes for formative and summative assessment, and course administration.
- A Video Conferencing System that supports online synchronous learning and consultations with teachers and small group discussions with peers.
- Access to an electronic textbook and/or the provider's digital library resources that can be accessed remotely and seamlessly through the LMS/VLE.
- A dedicated IT platform that supports the recording and playback of digital video, which usually integrates with the LMS/VLE.
- Links to Open Educational Resources (OERs) freely available through the Internet, which are regularly shared during on-site classes and through the LMS/VLE.
- A platform typically integrated into the LMS/VLE that provides access to an e-portfolio for critical self-reflection and formative assessment.
- Learning activities and assessment tasks that require and encourage students to use a wide variety of digital tools to successfully complete their programme of study.
- Assessment submitted, often checked for originally through a plagiarism detection platform, then marked and returned to learners with feedback through electronic or other media.
- Student support and development services that enhance learner success, including online resources for maths, writing, career advice, etc.

Additionally, some programmes may incorporate virtual labs, language apps, online simulations, augmented reality experiences and electronic proctoring for summative assessment and final examinations. There are many other possibilities. The important thing is that as providers look to innovate and pilot new digital tools, they also evaluate them to ensure they contribute to a quality blended or hybrid learning experience. The fundamental principle is that digital education needs to be done purposefully and is not an addition that merely builds another expensive educational layer without 'adding value' to learning.

The level of blending in a programme may vary from weak to the deep embedding of digital tools and resources, with either small or large numbers of learners. Similarly, the online component may form a small or substantive part of the overall experience, depending on the context, type of learners and intended learning outcomes. Some practical programmes or subject disciplines may not lend themselves to a substantial online experience. For this reason, the percentage of face-to-face direct teaching on-campus should be clearly stated and understood by all stakeholders. There is no single recipe to the design of blended and hybrid learning programmes, which is why the guidelines offer key principles of good practice rather than a simple cookbook of solutions.

2.2 What are the common features of online learning programmes?

Most of the above common features are also found in online learning programmes, except for face-to-face tuition on a physical site or campus. While online learning may be nothing more than a weekly live synchronous classroom, a richer and more comprehensive experience is usually supported by a LMS. These guidelines expect the LMS will continue to play an important role in the wider VLE in the foreseeable future. Any core online learning platform within the VLE must be GDPR compliant and will usually integrate with the provider's other systems, particularly the Student Information System (SIS). Industry standard cybersecurity measures should be in place for all core online platforms to minimise business continuity risks.

Examples of how learning will take place should be available before learners decide to study. Learners should know what study involves. An online learning programme will usually begin with a virtual welcome or orientation. Resources should be available to support learners to develop their digital skills and learn how to be an effective online learner. Providers may also offer additional learning support and development services targeted to the needs of online learners studying at a distance. Learners may be encouraged to meet in person if they live in proximity. While opportunities may be available to meet teachers and peers at the provider's site or campus, these will be voluntary and should not be required to meet programme learning outcomes.

While during the COVID-19 crisis emergency remote teaching was a necessary response, with limited opportunity to adopt the principles of good practice in online learning design, the research literature is unequivocal that well-designed online programmes can be as good as or even better than traditional teaching methods (Martin, et al., 2022)[11]. The crucial factor in terms of quality is not the study mode but rather the learning design. A quality experience, irrespective of the study mode, requires an intentional focus on the most appropriate learning design, teaching methods and materials to support particular learner cohorts and the intended programme outcomes.

It follows that benchmarks and quality indicators designed for traditional face-to-face provision are not always fit-for-purpose in an online learning context and need to be adapted. For example, indicators related to teaching preparation time, number of contact hours, utilisation of physical learning spaces, frequency of library visits, opening hours for student services, engagement in placements, access to clubs, sporting and other extracurricular activities may not be relevant in making judgements about the design, quality, and provision of online learning programmes.

2.3 Why guidelines rather than minimum standards?

Quality assurance needs to reflect the diversity of the Irish sector and accommodate the changing landscape. Thus, a set of minimum standards for digital education is too narrow. The good practice principles underlying these guidelines recognise a variety of contexts and provide a reference point rather than a recipe to inform, benchmark and enhance the design of blended, hybrid and/or online learning experiences. They indicate quality considerations across a wide spectrum of provision and recognise that programmes supported by digital education can take many different forms. The context is crucial to how an individual provider will design, implement, and evaluate programmes based on these guidelines. For this reason, after presenting the guidelines, several examples are provided of how different types of providers might use and apply them to enhance quality assurance and continuous improvement.

[11] Martin, F. Sun, T., Westine, C., & Ritzhaupt, A. (2022). Examining research on the impact of distance and online learning: A second-order meta-analysis study. *Educational Research Review, 6,* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2022.100438

SECTION 2: THE GUIDELINES

3 STRUCTURE

These guidelines have been developed on the premise that quality assurance is most effective when providers take responsibility for it themselves (QQI, 2016)[12]. The primary responsibility for quality lies with providers and their teaching, administrative and professional support staff. Thus, responsibility for quality needs to be owned, shared, and distributed right across the provider. Of course, providers also need to work closely with learners as partners in their own learning and in consultation with industry and community stakeholders.

Importantly, these guidelines recognise that quality assurance serves different purposes. On the one hand, it ensures statutory compliance, offers public accountability, and provides some safeguards for learners and employers on the quality of blended, hybrid and online learning programmes, as required by QQI. On the other hand, these guidelines have been constructed to help support providers in their commitment to quality enhancement and continuous improvements. They seek to support a mutually reinforcing cycle of quality in the ongoing development of programmes supported by digital education.

It follows that a second key premise is that quality assurance is not a "tick box" exercise. Accordingly, beyond statutory requirements, providers can use the guidelines to help *guide*, *monitor,* and *enable* the continuous improvement and fit-for-purpose provision of blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes. In this respect, there is no end point in defining quality, especially given ongoing developments in digital technology continue to redefine the art of the possible in digital education provision.

A third underlying premise is that quality assurance needs to be multi-faceted and multi-dimensional. For this reason, the good practice indicators that follow recognise that a continuous quality assurance loop needs to consider inputs, processes, resources, and outputs. Accordingly, these guidelines address each of these overlapping and mutually connected aspects of quality assurance. They particularly encourage providers to give attention to outputs in their commitment to quality enhancement.

3.1 How are the guidelines structured?

These guidelines and the related good practice indicators for blended, hybrid and online learning programmes are structured around three contexts. They support a multi-layered approach that builds on the structure of the previous *Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes* (QQI, 2018)[13]. Accordingly, the guidelines are organised under the following three headings:

- Organisational context
- Programme context
- Learner experience context

The *Organisation Context* recognises the importance of leadership, quality management, relevant policies and regulations, and the provision of infrastructure fit-for-purpose in the provider's context. There are six domains:

[12] Quality and Qualifications Ireland. (2016). *Policy in quality assurance guidelines.* https://www.qqi.ie/sites/default/files/2021-11/qp-10-policy-on-quality-assurance-guidelines.pdf

[13] Quality and Qualifications Ireland. (2018). *Statutory quality assurance guidelines for providers of blended learning programmes.* https://www.qqi.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/Statutory%20QA%20Guidelines%20for%20Blended%20Learning%20Programmes.pdf

- Strategy, management and implementation plans
- Polices, regulations and administrative processes
- Finances, infrastructure and resources
- Staff training, professional development and institutional support
- Strategic collaborations and partnerships
- Learners outside of Ireland

The *Programme Context* focuses on the curriculum design and considers the programme structure, coherence, sequencing, teaching and assessment methods in enabling blended, hybrid or online learners to meet intended learning outcomes. It contains six domains:

- Programme outcomes
- Approval and validation processes
- Learning and curriculum design
- Learning materials and resources
- Assessment and feedback practices
- Evaluation and continuous improvement

The *Learner Experience Context* addresses the importance of support, promoting high levels of engagement and equality of opportunity. Notably, it includes several additional quality assurance considerations from those in the previous guidelines. This section reflects an even stronger focus on the learner and the quality of their learning experience in programmes supported by digital education. There are four domains:

- Thinking about study
- Learning support and development
- Equality of opportunity
- Learner experience and outcomes

Each context begins with a brief 'Scoping Statement' and each domain provides a "Good Practice Statement" followed by a series of good practice considerations that might need to be in place. Importantly, not every provider is expected to have every quality procedure as this depends on the context and the nature of the programme. The guidelines under each domain balance as much as possible the level of detail or specificity required for robust quality assurance procedures, with the additional time, resources and burden of proof placed on providers. While they are comprehensive, the guidelines do not address every possible quality consideration that emerged from the literature review or during stakeholder consultations. To do so would result in an even longer set of guidelines, which for some providers would be unrealistic to apply or implement in practice.

3.2 How are additional quality considerations for online programmes shown?

These guidelines assume that most quality considerations and related good practice indicators apply to all programmes supported by digital education. This assumption is supported by an analysis of the relevant literature undertaken in the development of the guidelines. However, the analysis also revealed several additional quality considerations that providers who offer online learning programmes may need to address under each context, such as: access; readiness; digital skills; the mix of synchronous and asynchronous delivery; the design and development procedures for approving and updating learning materials; the accessibility of learning resources; the arrangements for student support, development and guidance; academic integrity; learners who reside outside of Ireland.

DRAFT

Therefore, several additional quality considerations specific to online learning programmes appear under each of the three contexts and related domains, where appropriate. They are clearly shown in the table format through an indented row under the relevant good practice indictor listing specific quality assurance considerations. The tables also include some cases where quality assurance considerations for blended and hybrid learning differ to those for online learning programmes.

4 DOMAINS AND PROCEDURES

This section introduces the domains and good practice quality assurance considerations for each of the contexts.

4.1 Organisational context

The focus of this first section is on the strategic and institution-wide aspects of managing quality for blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes, including strategy, policy and administrative processes, technical infrastructure and training and professional development requirements for developing appropriately skilled personnel.

At the organisational level, it is necessary to demonstrate an understanding of the distinctive demands that digital education provision will make on infrastructure and systems that differ from traditional face-to-face contexts. Where the nature of high quality blended, hybrid and online learning is not properly understood, provision that was originally designed for a face-to-face learning environment may be poorly adapted for learners. For example, teaching staff with limited knowledge or experience of online learning may not appreciate the pedagogical opportunities and challenges. Learners will not generally have a good experience if what they receive are essentially lectures, learning resources, and other activities designed for face-to-face courses with little redesign for digital education contexts.

The responsibility of providers to offer a good learning experience, and the potential reputational risk of not doing so, is significant. Online learning providers should be particularly mindful of using learner-centred approaches, which support active learning rather than merely delivering digital content to a cohort of geographically dispersed learners. Accessibility must be considered, especially as many online learners are known to choose this mode of study due to disabilities or specific learning needs[14].

IT infrastructure and administrative systems originally designed for face-to-face teaching contexts are unlikely to be fit-for-purpose for blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes. Specialist, reliable and accessible digital tools and platforms are required for designing, developing, and delivering online learning. Tracking learner progress and achievement, marking and returning assessments, providing feedback to learners and assessors are just a few of the areas where existing policies, systems and processes may need to be adapted or revised for digital education provision.

A decision to offer some or all provision through blended, hybrid or online learning should therefore be a considered one and form part of a provider's vision, supported by an approved and well-funded strategy. The enthusiasm and expertise of a few people should not be the driver for such a decision, although such energy should be harnessed, recognised, and valued. This usually means there needs to be a strategy and plan, an appropriate investment to develop capacity and services to ensure high quality blended, hybrid and/or online learning that will offer learners a good experience. The following series of tables expand on these points, with six domains related to the Organisational Context level.

[14] See Healy, R. (2022). *Learning from home 2021: A survey of Irish FET and HE students with disabilities learning through COVID-19.* AHEAD. Available at https://www.ahead.ie/userfiles/files/Learning%20from%20home%20report_digital.pdf

GUIDELINES FOR PROVIDERS OF PROGRAMMES SUPPORTED BY DIGITAL EDUCATION	
ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT	
Scoping Statement	The Organisational Context focuses on strategic and institution-wide aspects of managing quality for programmes supported by digital education. It establishes whether appropriate procedures are in place for strategy, policies, regulations and administrative processes, finance, infrastructure, resources, training and professional development, institutional support, strategic collaborationn, and partnerships, and for addressing issues related to learners studying outside of Ireland.
1. Strategy, Management, and Implementation Plans	
Good Practice Statement	A clear vision, explicit strategy, and well-developed management plans address, build capacity and enable best practice for digital education provision.
Good practice is supported and reflected by:	1.1. A clear vision and strategic approach to the development of blended, hybrid and/or online learning which is part of the provider's mission and shared and widely understood by staff, learners and other stakeholders.
	1.2 Approved strategies and implementation plans are clear about the provider's aspirations both now and in the future for the development of provision through digital education.
	1.3 Alignment between the provider's strategy, teaching and learning plans and implementation plans for digital education, with appropriate links and cross-referencing to other key strategies, policies and plans.
	1.4 Accountable key leadership roles, with business processes ownership clearly defined, and appropriate structures place to support blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision.
	1.5 Alignment of programme development, including micro-credentials offered through flexible study modes, between institutional plans and initiatives by individual units, schools or departments.
	1.6 New strategic initiatives for blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes are subject to business case approval to establish their viability and long-term sustainability.

	1.7 New programme proposals for blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes draw on market intelligence to demonstrate the scale of demand and potential income will ensure their viability and long-term sustainability.	
	1.8 A contingency plan enables programmes to continue to be offered to leaners with minimal disruption should digital infrastructure fail or experience a serious outage.	
	Online Programmes	For online programmes, the plan **must** include consideration of digital channels outside of the provider's normal infrastructure to ensure minimal disruption to teaching, learning and assessment for learners studying at a distance.

2. Policies, Regulations and Administrative Processes	
Good Practice Statement	A clear set of policies, regulations and fit-for-purpose administrative processes address, support and enable best practice for blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision.
Good practice is supported and reflected by:	2.1 Policies, regulations and administration processes that are fit-for-purpose for the provision of blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes, including micro-credentials.
	2.2 Clearly defined study modes, where staff, learners and other stakeholders understand the provider's terminology for describing the differences between study modalities.
	2.3 Approved and published expectations for the quality of digital education provision, including LMS/VLE minimum standards, design templates and accessibility requirements for digital materials and study resources.
	2.4 Specification documents providing specific information about the requirements for the validation of new blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes, including micro-credentials, and related monitoring and evaluation processes.
	2.5 Academic and programme regulations support and recognise the reduced study intensity and part-time nature of many blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes.

	2.6 Recruitment and admissions policies and student information systems and related processes allow learners to efficiently register for their chosen programme of study, pay relevant fees and access crucial information.	
	Online Programmes	For online learning programmes with a different fee structure, an explicit fees policy and processes **must** be in place which identify the types of services and payment arrangements for learners studying at a distance, including refunds and costs for Springboard+ offerings.
	2.7 An explicit workload model for teaching staff recognises preparation time, goes beyond measuring direct contact hours and supports flexible learning through the substitution of traditional teaching methods with online synchronous and/or asynchronous engagement.	
	2.8 Arrangements for assuring compliance with any legal or regulatory obligations are appropriate to the provision of digital education. For example, this may include: • child protection • Equity, diversity, and inclusion • intellectual property and copyright • clear parameters on data protection including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) • applicable professional or statutory body requirements • local regulatory considerations in the context of transnational provision	
	2.9 Digital communication channels support effective relationship management enabling timely and efficient response to learners' enquiries, administrative requests and resolution of appeals and complaints.	
	2.10 Assessment policies, protocols and administrative processes provide a secure, confidential, and reliable means for submitting work to be assessed with confirmation of receipt, and explicit, equitable and fair arrangements for the timely marking, monitoring and return of feedback.	
	2.11 An Academic Integrity policy helps to educate staff and students about ethics and the importance of properly attributing their work to original sources, with resources available to understand the risks of plagiarism, contract cheating and AI-generated written texts and products, especially for learners known to be vulnerable to such practices.	

DRAFT

	2.12 There are robust arrangements in place to confirm the identity of learners such as two factor identity verification to help mitigate against fraudulent practices, attempts to gain unfair advantage, or academic malpractice.
	2.13 When electronic proctoring platforms are used to administer examinations and other summative assessments they are governed by clear policies and protocols and meet ethical and privacy requirements, with learners fully informed of how their data will be stored, managed, used, and deleted.
	2.14 A consistent approach and [online] survey is used to allow learners to regularly evaluate the quality of their learning experiences and the aggregated findings and proposed actions arising from such evaluations are shared with learners.
	2.15 A dedicated unit, service or person is responsible for managing, coordinating, and revising the provider's quality assurance procedures in response to new developments in digital education provision so they continue to be fit-for-purpose.
	2.16 Quality assurance procedures are in place across the provider where relevant performance data informs regular reports, cyclical reviews, and institutional self-assessment of blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision.

3. Finances, Infrastructure and Resources	
Good Practice Statement	The level of financial investment, type of IT infrastructure and available resources build capacity and enable best practice for blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision.
Good practice is supported and reflected by:	3.1 The provider's strategy or implementation plan includes appropriate investment in infrastructure and allocates sufficient funding and resources to ensure a quality programme supported by digital education.
	3.2 Robust costing models which consider the additional costs associated with IT infrastructure, depreciation, and replacement of equipment, developing and updating learning resources, induction, training and support for staff and learners engaged in blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision.
	3.3 A planned approach to the procurement of services and IT infrastructure which meets appropriate tender requirements, includes a clear policy for approval of exceptions, and follows robust selection processes.

	3.4 The infrastructure and IT resources required to support the provision of good quality blended, hybrid and/or online learning are understood, planned, integrated, interoperable and routinely monitored and evaluated.	
	3.5 A fit-for-purpose Student Information System (SIS) helps to maintain accurate records and supports the increased flexibility possible through blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes, including shorter forms of learning offered as micro-credentials.	
	3.6 A fully supported and fit-for-purpose LMS, which is regularly upgraded, enables the increased flexibility afforded by the design of blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes.	
	3.7 Where appropriate, several other fit-for-purpose digital tools and platforms support the LMS which together form the wider VLE that provides the capacity for quality blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision.	
	3.8 Approved digital tools and online platforms are available that integrate with the LMS to enable teachers to record and share videos for asynchronous learning and to host live synchronous lectures, tutorials and webinars.	
	3.9 A reliable IT platform or third-party service is available to check where necessary the work produced by learners for potential plagiarism or breaches of academic integrity, including the undisclosed use of AI-generated products.	
	3.10 Learners should be able to access remotely the provider's library, electronic databases, and textbooks relevant to their programme of study.	
	Online Programmes	For online learning programmes, learners **must** be able to access remotely the provider's library, electronic databases, and textbooks relevant to their programme of study.
	3.11 Mechanisms for the online submission and transfer of learners' work directly to assessors have been approved and tested by the provider to ensure they are secure and reliable; and there is an institutionally approved and consistent means of proving or confirming the safe receipt of work.	
	3.12 The capacity, currency and life expectancy of the infrastructure is appropriate to support plans and ambitions for digital education provision, including the scale of programme offerings and number of anticipated learners.	
	3.13 Opportunities are available and ideally supported by innovation grants to pilot and evaluate new digital tools and platforms for teaching, learning and assessment.	

DRAFT

	3.14 Any new digital tools and platforms being piloted or implemented have had their reliability and security tested and signed, with confirmation that appropriate technical support and contingency plans are in place.
	3.15 Institutionally approved transitional arrangements are in place to support any migration to new or different IT infrastructure taking account of the need to maintain compatibility with the technology that learners are currently using.
	3.16 All data contained in core IT infrastructure that is essential to the provision of blended, hybrid and/or online learning must be backed up on a regular basis.
	3.17 Robust cybersecurity and protection measures are in place for all IT infrastructure used to support blended, hybrid and/or online learning, with two factor authentication where appropriate and stated expectations regarding the need to update passwords on a regular basis.
	3.18 Contingency arrangements in the event of IT platform, hardware, or software failures are in place to restore services for programmes supported by digital education as quickly as possible.
	3.19 Effective institutional arrangements to provide assurance that: • platform licensing issues are addressed for technology deployed in programmes supported by digital education, including any software provided to learners. • digital tools and online platforms are being effectively used by teachers and those who support teaching, and by learners, as evidenced by learning analytics. • teaching and learning has occurred, including assessment and feedback and learner evaluation of the blended, hybrid and/or online learning experience at both the module and programme level.
	3.20 Providers understand and endeavour to minimise the environmental impact of the digital tools and platforms they use for blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision.

4. Staff Training, Professional Development and Institutional Support		
Good Practice Statement	The availability of staff training and professional development and the level of institutional support for teachers, and for those who support teaching and provide crucial administrative services, builds capacity, and enables best practice for blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision.	
Good practice is supported and reflected by:	4.1 The strategies and processes for the appointment, induction, training, professional development, and appraisal arrangements for teachers and for those who support teaching are appropriate and specific to blended, hybrid and/or online learning contexts.	
	4.2 There is a planned approach to the appointment of (or access to) specialist staff to support the provider's blended, hybrid and/or online learning strategy, including people with teaching, technical and professional expertise appropriate to integrating new digital technologies in the learning experience.	
	4.3 Subject expertise and academic qualifications remain important criteria in recruiting appropriate staff but also include competencies required, for example, in designing and facilitating programmes supported by digital education, with an understanding of the pedagogical differences between study modes.	
	4.4 The provider has a specialist unit or access to dedicated staffing capable of designing, facilitating, and evaluating appropriate online or face-to-face training and professional development opportunities to develop digital skills and the capacity to design good quality blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes.	
	4.5 Staff engaged in teaching programmes supported by digital education should participate in appropriate training and professional development and have access to mentoring from more experienced colleagues.	
	Online Programmes	For online learning programmes, staff **must** either demonstrate previous experience of teaching online or participate in appropriate induction, training and professional development before they facilitate courses, and have access to ongoing support from more experienced colleagues.

DRAFT

	4.6 There is specialist training and professional development for teaching staff and other support personnel on contemporary issues related to blended, hybrid and online learning provision, such as accessibility, academic integrity, AI-generated products, how to effectively use and acknowledge open educational resources, etc.
	4.7 There is specialist training and professional development for teaching staff and other support personnel on how to appropriately use digital tools and software applications for content development, media production, video conferencing, virtual simulations, electronic tests, etc.
	4.8 Training and professional development is available for staff managing key infrastructure, including awareness, and understanding of new and emerging digital technologies that can be used to support digital education.
	4.9 Training is available for all staff and learners to increase awareness of cybersecurity as part of risk mitigation, with stated expectations concerning completion and relevant monitoring.
	4.10 Staff are aware of available training opportunities and there is a record of participation data on the number of people and frequency in which they engage in training and continuous professional development related to digital education.
	4.11 There is planned collaboration between teaching staff and other support and specialist personnel, such as learning designers and media production officers, in the process of designing and developing new blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes.
	4.12 Communities of practice exist either online or face-to-face for sharing and fostering the pedagogically sound and innovative use of digital technologies for teaching, learning and assessment.
	4.13 A helpdesk service, just-in-time support or informal training is available when teaching staff and other support personnel require assistance in their provision of blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes.
	4.14 Examples of good practice along with comprehensive [online] resources are available to support teaching staff and other support personnel in their provision of blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes.
	4.15 Awards, promotion criteria and capability frameworks recognise digital skills and efforts to redesign the curriculum and develop teaching methods which harness the potential of digital education provision.

	4.16 There are opportunities for teachers and those who support teaching to engage in relevant research and small innovation projects to learn more about and contribute to the understanding of good practice in digital education provision.
	4.17 There are opportunities for staff to network beyond the provider and engage in external professional bodies and communities that focus on supporting best practice in blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision (e.g., Irish Learning Technology Association, EDEN Digital Learning Europe, European Digital Education Hub).

5. Strategic Collaborations and Partnerships	
Good Practice Statement	Strategic collaborations and partnerships that advance the institution's strategy for blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision are cognisant of, and consistent with, the Core Statutory QA Guidelines for all providers and topic- or sector-specific guidelines as appropriate.
Good practice is supported and reflected by:	5.1 Arrangements for collaboration or partnership as set out in the Core Statutory QA Guidelines recognise any additional risks or responsibilities to be specified for providers and learners engaging in blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes.
	5.2 Arrangements for quality management in general are consistent with the Core Statutory QA Guidelines for all providers and topic- or sector-specific guidelines as appropriate.
	5.3 Where a provider is relying on a second provider, collaborator, or consortium of partners to provide parts of a blended, hybrid and/or online learning programme, including micro-credentials, relevant aspects of delivery and learner support are covered by internal quality assurance procedures.
	5.4 Formal written agreements are in place with collaborators and partners which clearly specify the respective costs, rights and division of responsibilities, including protocols for data protection for those processing data, service provision, quality assurance procedures and dispute resolution arrangements.
	5.5 Learners and staff are made aware which provider or organisation carries legal responsibility for the delivery or support of defined sections of any blended, hybrid or online learning programme offered in collaboration with one or more partners.

DRAFT

	5.6 Where one provider offers an initiative that aims to enhance or provide additional support (either face-to-face or online) for a blended, hybrid and/or online learning programme offered by a different provider, the relationship between the two providers is made clear to all stakeholders, including responsibility for technology provision, service delivery and quality assurance of such complementary arrangements.

6. Learners Outside of Ireland	
Good Practice Statement	Where learners reside outside of Ireland, due diligence and risk management arrangements are robust and fit-for-purpose and where teaching methods, student supports and administrative services need to be adapted to the local context, they follow the principles of equity, fairness and equivalency to ensure all learners can achieve the programme learning outcomes.
Good practice is supported and reflected by:	6.1 Business case, due diligence and risk management arrangements are robust and fit-for-purpose where blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes target and attract learners residing outside of Ireland. For the purpose of these guidelines, "outside of Ireland" refers to countries outside the Irish State.
	6.2 Internal business cases requirements consider the viability, scalability and sustainability of proposed blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes which aim to attract learners outside of Ireland.
	6.3 Internal business cases and approval processes for programmes supported by digital education that target and aim to attract learners outside of Ireland address any relevant *legal, statutory* or *regulatory* requirements that apply, including: • permission for foreign providers to operate within the local jurisdiction. • definitions of 'student' that may impact delivery model and funding streams. • Visa entry requirements for the country in which the face-to-face component of the programme is taught. • due regard to employment law that may inhibit the ability to employ local tutors or use other support functions. • provider's software or learning resources licences are valid in the local jurisdiction; or other arrangements are in place. • due regard to the location of servers to ensure they meet European and/or local jurisdiction requirements. • due regard to ensure the local jurisdiction intellectual property rights or copyright laws are not compromised.

	• due regard for regulations that may prohibit the charging of fees or transfer of funds outside of the local jurisdiction. • due regard for local law or expectations of consumer protection that safeguard learners' interests. • responsibilities related to the *Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners.* • due regard to local financial regulations, taxation issues and risks of fines and sanctions in the case of poor service delivery. • requirements for local accreditation or recognition by statutory or regulatory bodies, which may be at programme and/or institutional level. • recognition of qualifications gained that include a component of online learning in the local jurisdiction and related employment prospects and reputation risks.
	6.4 Internal business cases and approval processes for programmes supported by digital education that target and aim to attract learners outside of Ireland address relevant pedagogical and support issues that apply, including: • restricted Internet access due to poor local infrastructure that may limit the range of online learning experiences and level of teacher interactivity and learner engagement. • restricted Internet access due to local government censorship or blocks placed by employers • time zones differences that may limit students' ability to engage in synchronous learning experiences • cultural considerations that may inhibit group interactions due to gender, religious and other considerations. • Ability to complete summative assessments that are proctored either online or in person at a suitable local venue.
	6.5 Providers can demonstrate they have robustly tested delivery systems to ensure that learners outside Ireland will have a quality blended, hybrid and/or online learning experience, with equivalent access to learning resources, student supports and administrative services.

DRAFT

4.2 Programme context

The focus of this section is on the key issues and principles of good practice in provider responsibility for assuring quality in the design, development, facilitation, and evaluation of blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes. In this context, the term programme refers to awards recognised within the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), including micro-credentials under the category of Special Purpose Awards. Except for micro-credentials, most awards, irrespective of duration, level, volume of credit, or accreditation consist of a series of individual modules where learners are expected to achieve defined learning outcomes, which combine to meet the programme learning outcomes.

Approval procedures supporting the design, development, and facilitation of programmes supported by digital education need to ensure that direct and indirect contact hours offered through synchronous or asynchronous teaching methods, or a combination of both, reflect the credit value of modules and the programme. The curriculum design process should consider programme structure, coherence, and sequencing with reference to the most appropriate design to enable learners to meet intended learning outcomes. A learner-centred design reflecting the principles of good practice will recognise the type of learners likely to engage in the programme and adopt active learning approaches to promote student engagement and high levels of interactivity between teachers and learners and peers.

The teaching, learning and assessment strategies will be explicitly designed for the study mode, the particular subject discipline, and the intended learning outcomes. Accordingly, it should be apparent how the programme is informed by best practice in the design of blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision. The quality of learning resources also plays a distinctive and critical role. Digital resources should be chosen to ensure alignment with the structure, content and assessment and engage learners through a variety of media, including open educational resources. The time required to engage with learning resources should be calculated as part of the learning design and be proportionate to the credit-value. Learners should also be encouraged to search for, critically review and draw on additional resources they find through the provider's electronic library and/or other databases.

Similarly, assessment design is crucial in meeting the learning outcomes and plays a key role in the overall quality of the learners' experience. Digital technologies create new opportunities for more authentic and collaborative forms of assessment *for* learning, and they can also be used to provide more timely and constructive formative feedback. Therefore, where appropriate, the creative and deliberate integration of digital technology for assessment and feedback should feature in well-designed blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes.

Recognising learners as important partners in their own learning, they should have regular opportunities throughout the programme to evaluate the quality of their experience. Those involved in teaching programmes supported by digital education need to engage in cyclical review and evaluation, where relevant data and learning analytics inform continuous improvements to the programme. The quality of the programme should be evident from learner success, student evaluation data, retention and completion rates, employer satisfaction and evidence of graduate destinations.

The following series of tables expand on these points with six domains related to the Programme Context level for digital education provision.

PROGRAMME CONTEXT	
Scoping Statement	The Programme Context focuses on the programme as a whole and the approval and validation processes and whether the level, duration, and volume of credit are appropriate, the degree to which learning outcomes are responsive to changing work, industry or community needs and the study mode is fit-for-purpose. It establishes whether appropriate procedures are in place to follow the principles of good practice for blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision with overall coherence and constructive alignment between the learning outcomes and the curriculum design, including the teaching methods, learner interactivity, learning materials and resources, assessment and feedback practices, and evaluation strategies.
7. Programme Outcomes	
Good Practice Statement	The programme is appropriate to the NQF award-type, level, duration, and volume of credit, is responsive to changing work, industry or community needs, and the study mode and sequencing is fit-for-purpose so learners can clearly achieve the intended learning outcomes through blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision.
Good practice is supported and reflected by:	7.1 The programme's level, duration and volume of credit is appropriate for delivery through the chosen blended, hybrid and/or online learning study mode.
	7.2 The programme learning outcomes can be achieved through a study mode supported by digital education where learners complete their learning through an appropriate blended, hybrid or online learning modality.
	Online Programmes: For online programmes, the learning outcomes **must** be achievable through this study mode where learners complete all their learning online with no compulsory requirement for on-site face-to-face teaching.
	7.3 The programme as a whole is coherent, well-structured, appropriately sequenced, and effectively integrates blended, hybrid and/or online learning experiences throughout units, with evidence that the design has been informed by learner-centred principles and an evolving understanding of good practice in digital education.
	7.4 The programme's discipline context is suitable for blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision, with evidence that the design has been informed by subject-specific learner-centred principles and an evolving understanding of good practice in digital education specific to the area of study.

	7.5 The programme learning outcomes, including micro-credentials, are responsive to changing work, industry and community needs and the blended, hybrid and/or online learning study mode is fit-for-purpose for learners seeking or already employed in the target sector.
	7.6 The programme development team includes appropriate representation and enables collaboration between subject matter experts, learning design and educational technology specialists, IT staff, library personnel, learning support and development advisers, and other key internal stakeholder expertise.
	7.7 Programme level resource planning includes a budget for course development, production of learning resources and materials and sufficient time for the design, updating and peer review of individual topics or units in the LMS or wider VLE.
	7.8 Information is available to the programme team on institutional policies, systems, and processes for blended, hybrid and/or online learning, with relevant approved design templates and any minimum standards that provide consistency in the look and feel of the LMS or wider VLE.

8. Approval and Validation Processes	
Good Practice Statement	Approval and validation processes for blended, hybrid and online learning programmes are fit-for-purpose, engage all key stakeholders, support robust decision-making, draw on business intelligence, address staffing and resourcing requirements, consider financial viability and sustainability, evaluate how the planned curriculum design, teaching methods and assessment strategies reflect learner-centred principles, and recognise the need for ongoing quality assurance.
Good practice is supported and reflected by:	8.1 Approval and validation processes for blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes are appropriate and fit-for-purpose, including protocols for the offering of micro-credentials.
	8.2 Approval and validation processes consider whether the programme's level, duration, and volume of credit is appropriate for the chosen study mode and provide expectations where appropriate about the percentage of face-to-face teaching and maximum class sizes to manage online interactivity.
	8.3 Approval and validation processes engage all key stakeholders, support robust decision-making, and draw on relevant business intelligence.

	8.4 Approval and validation processes consider financial viability and sustainability of the business model and identify and address staffing and ongoing resourcing requirements.
	8.5 Approval and validation processes describe any strategic collaborations or partnerships with other providers, professional bodies or third parties offering digital service and what agreements are in place to mitigate risks and maintain business continuity, especially when offered outside of Ireland.
	8.6 Approval and validation processes consider staff qualifications and experience in blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision and arrangements for training and continuing professional development, especially where there are identified skill gaps.
	8.7 Approval and validation processes identify the timeframe for early confirmation of staffing resources and whether use will be made of external tutors and what at stage they will be recruited to determine a demonstrable supply of contract staff with experience of blended, hybrid and/or online learning, and the criteria for their appointment.
	8.8 Approval and validation processes describe what digital tools and platforms will be used to facilitate teaching and learner interactivity and provide access to digital learning resources and materials.
	8.9 Approval and validation processes consider how the planned curriculum design, teaching methods and assessment strategies reflect learner-centred principles and good practice in blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision.
	8.10 Approval and validation processes describe what learning resources and materials will be available and what remote access learners will have to library and other electronic databases.
	8.11 Approval and validation processes describe the synchronous and/or asynchronous teaching methods planned to support teacher-learner and learner-learner interactivity following learner-centred principles.
	8.12 Approval and validation processes map how assessment in individual units of study contribute to the programme learning outcomes and engage learners in an appropriate variety of individual and group-based assessment tasks which harness the potential of digital technologies.
	8.13 Approval and validation processes address what testing of delivery platforms and environments will be undertaken to confirm that it is possible for learners to engage in blended, hybrid and/or online learning, especially if studying outside of Ireland.

DRAFT

	8.14 Approval and validation processes consider whether the entire programme will be fully designed before being offered to learners or developed as they progress through their programme of study.	
	8.15 Approval and validation processes indicate how the programme meets and is bound by the provider's commitments to privacy and data protection laws and safeguard learners' confidentiality and consumer rights, especially when offered outside of Ireland.	
	8.16 Approval and validation processes for programmes supported by digital education describe mechanisms for verifying the identity of learners throughout their programme of study but particularly regarding assessment, to mitigate risks against fraudulent practices, attempts to gain unfair advantage, or academic malpractice.	
	8.17 Approval and validation processes identify the academic owner of all units or modules that contribute to the programme, especially when some parts or components of the blended, hybrid and/or online learning experience is outsourced to another provider.	
	8.18 Approval and validation processes describe what policies, procedures and resources are used to promote academic integrity, including mitigation of fraudulent practices and monitoring of AI-generated texts and other types of digital artefacts.	
	8.19 Approval and validation processes describe what online communication channels will be available for learner enquires and consultations with teaching and administrative staff.	
	8.20 Approval and validation processes describe what provision there is for learning support and development, especially for the provision of micro-credentials, and how learners can develop their digital skills and ability to learn how to be an effective online learner.	
	8.21 Approval and validation processes describe the administrative protocols to accurately maintain records, monitor progression and achievement and offer appropriate interventions for learners who may be struggling or at risk of failure, especially those studying at a distance.	
	8.22 Approval and validation processes for programmes supported by digital education identify on-site and/or virtual office hours when teaching staff are available for learner consultations.	
	Online Programmes	For online programmes, virtual office hours for learner consultations with teaching staff **must** consider time zone differences when people are studying outside of Ireland.

	8.23 Approval and validation processes for programmes supported by digital education need to describe how the online dimensions of the learning design promote learner engagement and success.	
	Online Programmes	For online programmes, approval and validation processes must describe specific strategies designed to foster a strong sense of belonging in the programme of study to help reduce the risk of non-completion.
	8.24 Approval and validation processes for shorter forms of learning leading to micro-credentials follow clear policies, regulations and procedures that describe their credit-bearing status, potential stackability, quality assurance protocols and suitability for blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision.	
	8.25 Approval and validation processes for programmes supported by digital education describe the strategies and procedures for ongoing quality assurance and identify how learning analytics and other types of information, such as stakeholder feedback, will inform evaluation and continuous improvement.	
	8.26 Approval and validation processes indicate how quality assurance procedures for blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes align with and meet the provider's commitments in other jurisdictions, including professional bodies and/or European requirements (e.g., ESG, ENQA, EQAVET, etc.).	

9. Learning and Curriculum Design	
Good Practice Statement	The curricula[15] for blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes follows learner-centred principles and an understanding of good practice that is informed by an explicit learning design model, approach or framework supporting constructive alignment to the intended learning outcomes, with purposeful consideration of the most appropriate and fit-for-purpose teaching, learning and assessment methods, and digital tools and platforms, for supporting high levels of interactivity between teachers and learners, learners and learners, and learners and their learning resources and materials.
	9.1 The curricula for blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes follows learner-centred principles and an evolving understanding of good practice in digital education.

[15] For the purpose of these guidelines the term 'curricula' is broadly defined as the totality of the programme of study, inclusive of the teaching, learning and assessment strategies that contribute to the learner experience.

DRAFT

Good practice is supported and reflected by: :	9.2 An explicit learning design model, approach or framework for the design of digital education informs the curriculum with constructive alignment to the programme learning outcomes.	
	9.3 An explicit learning design model, approach or framework for the design of digital education informs the curriculum with purposeful consideration of the most appropriate and fit-for-purpose teaching, learning and assessment methods.	
	9.4 The curricula for programmes supported by digital education gives purposeful consideration of the most appropriate and fit-for-purpose combination of face-to-face and online methods to support high levels of interactivity between teachers and learners, learners and learners, and learners and their learning resources and materials.	
	Online Programmes	For online programmes, the curricula **mus**t give purposeful consideration of the most appropriate use and/or combination of synchronous and asynchronous online methods to support high levels of interactivity.
	9.5 The design of live online synchronous classes is structured to engage learners in a variety of activities and promote interactivity consistent with the principles of active learning and learner-centred pedagogy (i.e., they should not simply replicate a traditional face-to-face lecture).	
	9.6 The curriculum gives purposeful consideration of the most appropriate and fit-for-purpose [digital] learning materials, including consideration of their accessibility and the potential use of open educational resources.	
	9.7 The curriculum gives purposeful consideration of the most appropriate and fit-for-purpose digital tools and platforms for engaging with teachers and enabling learners to meet the intended learning outcomes.	
	9.8 The curriculum design supported by digital education intentionally calculates the learners' workload and the allocated study time is appropriate and fit-for-purpose for the level, duration, and volume of credit.	
	9.9 The learning design process involves a development team with a wide range of expertise and encourages collaboration and constructive peer review by colleagues (and learners) of the planned teaching, learning and assessment methods, the online learning environment, and the learning materials and resources.	

	9.10 Administrative information describing the design, structure and sequence of the curriculum includes explicit protocols and expectations for learners on the types of engagement and participation required of them using online synchronous and/or asynchronous tools and platforms.

10. Learning Materials and Resources	
Good Practice Statement	Well-equipped and supported media production facilities and digital tools are available to develop a variety of fit-for-purpose learning materials and resources[16] and there is appropriate guidance on their effective use, including open educational resources (OER), based on the principles of accessibility and substitution[17], which are central to good practice for blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes.
Good practice is supported and reflected by:	10.1 There are well-equipped and supported media production facilities and digital tools available to develop a variety of fit-for-purpose learning materials and resources based on the principles of good practice.
	10.2 Teaching staff and those who support blended, hybrid and/or online learning are aware of the media production facilities and digital tools available to them and what levels of institutional support they can access.
	10.3 Planning for the development of learning materials and resources includes purposeful consideration of how to integrate a variety of media (print and/or digital) to promote interactivity and active learner engagement, and how they support and complement each other.
	10.4 Teaching staff and those who support the provision of digital education are aware of and know how to apply the principles of accessibility, as reflected in Universal Design for Learning[18] (UDL), when selecting learning materials and resources.
	10.5 Teaching staff and those who support blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes are aware of and know how to apply the principles of substitution when selecting learning materials and resources.

[16] Learning materials and resources can be in both a print and digital format and may include text, audio, video, animations, virtual simulations, AI-generated artefacts, AR/XR/VR and other types of rich media learning experiences.

[17] The principle of substitution refers to the purposeful replacement of direct teaching time and related learning materials with more engaging, flexible or appropriate digital content, rather than adding to existing teaching methods and resources with no consideration of any increase to the workload and study time for learners.

[18] To read more about UDL, see Jwad, et al., (2022). *Universal Design for Learning in tertiary education: A scoping review and recommendations for implementation in Australia*. Available at https://www.adcet.edu.au/resource/10814/universal-design-for-learning-in-tertiary-education-a-scoping-review-and-recommendations

DRAFT

	10.6 Guidance is available to teaching staff and those who support blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes on the effective use of open educational resources (OER), including how to locate, evaluate, acknowledge and adapt to fit the curriculum, where appropriate.
	10.7 Guidance and specialist expertise is available, either within the provider or from outside services, to raise awareness and support the production of new and emerging forms of rich media, such as animations, virtual simulations, AI-generated artefacts, augmented reality experiences, etc.
	10.8 Digital learning materials and resources are tested for their accessibility for learners who may have slower, less stable, or restricted Internet access, particularly when people are studying in rural locations or from outside of Ireland.
	10.9 Digital learning materials and resources are subject to constructive peer review from colleagues at one or more of the development stages and allow for the incorporation of feedback into subsequent and final versions of media.
	10.10 Digital learning materials and resources clearly indicate to learners the amount of time they should spend engaging with them and whether or not they are *core* or *supplementary* to the curriculum and their success in achieving the intended programme learning outcomes.
	10.11 All learning materials and resources are subject to approval and ongoing quality assurance and there is a development plan for updating digital content to ensure its currency and relevance based on defined standards or expectations about the length of life expectancy[19].

[19] While the currency and life expectancy of digital learning materials and resources varies depending on the media, typically, provision needs to be made after three years for the renewal or replacement of most digital content.

11. Assessment and Feedback Practices	
Good Practice Statement	Assessment and feedback practices in programmes supported by digital education reflect the principles of Assessment OF/FOR/AS Learning[20] and involve a variety of formative and summative assessment tasks[21], which reflect best practice in academic integrity[22] and integrate, where appropriate, the affordances of digital tools and platforms in enabling learners to achieve the intended learning outcomes.
Good practice is supported and reflected by:	11.1 Assessment and feedback practices in programmes supported by digital education reflect the principles of Assessment OF/FOR/AS Learning and involve a variety individual and/or group-based formative and summative assessment tasks that enable learners to achieve the programme learning outcomes.
	11.2 Assessment and feedback practices in blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes integrate, where appropriate, the technical and pedagogical affordances of digital tools and platforms in enabling learners to achieve the programme learning outcomes.
	11.3 Assessment and feedback practices in blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes reflect good practice and value learners as partners in the co-design of assessment, where they have opportunities, if appropriate, to use digital tools and platforms such as e-portfolio to critically reflect on their progress in achieving the programme learning outcomes.
	11.4 Assessment and feedback practices in blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes clearly map how formative and summative assessment in individual units or modules of study engage learners in a variety of tasks that contribute to the programme learning outcomes.

[20] This resource hosted by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education explains the principles of Assessment OF/FOR/AS learning: https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/our-priorities/student-success/assessment-of-for-as-learning/#!/Principles

[21] Generally, formative assessment measures how a learner is learning during their course of study, whereas summative assessment is designed to measure what a student has learned after a unit or course has reached its completion.

[22] Providers are advised to actively engage in the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) hosted by QQI to stay abreast of best practice in this area. See https://www.qqi.ie/what-we-do/engagement-insights-and-knowledge-sharing/national-academic-integrity-network

	11.5 Assessment and feedback practices for shorter forms of learning leading to micro-credentials offered in blended, hybrid and/or online learning contexts appropriately challenge learners in meeting the learning outcomes and follow the principles of good formative and summative assessment.
	11.6 Assessment and feedback practices for programmes supported by digital education adopt consistent protocols for the electronic submission of assessment and the return of feedback to learners.
	11.7 Individual teachers and wider programme team are aware of, bound by and committed to the provider's regulations, policies and protocols for assessment which ensure security and confidentiality when submitting work, providing feedback to individual learners and for the digital recording of marks or grades.
	11.8 Individual teachers and wider programme team are aware of, bound by and committed to the provider's regulations, policies, and protocols for academic integrity, which have the means and authority to confirm a learner's assessed work is the original work of that learner only.
	11.9 The programme integrates the provider's resources designed to promote a high level of academic integrity and raises awareness and educates students about ethics, the risks of plagiarism, contract cheating and the use of AI-generated products, especially for learners known to be vulnerable to such practices.
	11.10 The programme supported by digital education with the provision of electronic submission adopts fair and consistent arrangements in response to requests to submit assessment work after the stated submission due date, which are made explicit in advance to all learners.
	11.11 The programme provides learners with explicit marking or grading criteria in advance of completing both formative and summative assessment and adopts appropriate digital rubrics, feedback templates or similar which align to the individual module and programme learning outcomes.
	11.12 Individual teachers and wider programme team are aware of, bound by and committed to the provider's regulations, policies, and performance standards regarding the timeliness of feedback to learners following completion of assessment, with appropriate monitoring procedures in place.

	11.13 The assessment timing and synchronising considers factors such as cultural or religious calendars and for learners studying outside of Ireland is cognisant of different time zones.
	11.14 Individual teachers and wider programme team are aware of, bound by and committed to the provider's regulations, policies, and ethical and privacy requirements regarding the use of electronic proctoring platforms to administer summative assessment and to informing learners of how their data will be stored, managed, used, and deleted.
	11.15 Individual teachers and wider programme team are aware of, bound by and committed to the provider's regulations, policies, and processes for the moderation of assessment to ensure consistency and share good practice where more than one teacher or external assessor is employed to assess more than one group of learners.

12. Evaluation and Continuous Improvement	
Good Practice Statement	Evaluation and continuous improvement strategies for blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes are systemic and cyclical drawing on data from multiple sources, with clear evidence of how they inform future actions and development plans to enhance the quality of the curriculum to increase learner engagement, interactivity, and success.
Good practice is supported and reflected by:	12.1 The programme team are aware of, bound by and committed to the provider's regulations, policies and protocols for evaluation and continuous improvement, with strategies to ensure systemic and cyclical review.
	12.2 The programme team are aware of what learning analytics data is available to them and how they can access and appropriate interpret this information for evaluation and continuous improvement to enhance the quality of the curriculum and increase learner engagement, interactivity, and success.
	12.3 The programme team are aware of how they can monitor learner engagement, retention and completion rates and respond with appropriate supports and interventions, especially for at risk learners studying with a high percentage of online learning.
	12.4 The programme team are aware of, bound by and committed to the provider's regulations, policies, and survey instruments for learners' evaluation of individual units or modules of study which contribute to the programme.

DRAFT

	12.5 The programme team has procedures in place to share with teachers and professional support staff who contribute to the programme an interpretative analysis of learners' evaluation data of individual units or modules of study to support continuous improvement.
	12.6 The programme team has procedures in place to share and report back to learners the aggregated results of their evaluation of individual units or modules of study and proposed changes or enhancements arising from such feedback.
	12.7 The programme team is committed to programme-wide evaluation on a cyclical basis that gathers learner and graduate satisfaction data to inform enhancements and future development plans.
	12.8 The programme team is committed to programme-wide evaluation on a cyclical basis that gathers employer and other relevant stakeholder satisfaction data to inform enhancements and future development plans.
	12.9 The programme team has procedures in place to share and exchange with each other examples of good practice arising from evaluations to build a growing knowledge base of what works and why in blended, hybrid and/or online learning contexts.
	12.10 The programme team has procedures in place to include, where appropriate, as part of the evaluation process a person with specialist knowledge of good practice in digital education provision.
	12.11 Members of the programme team can engage in planned and approved pilot initiatives to test, where appropriate, new and emerging digital tools and platforms and other pedagogical innovations to establish their potential to enhance the quality of the curriculum and increase learner engagement, interactivity, and success.
	12.12 Members of the programme team can engage in approved research on some aspect of the programme following appropriate ethical protocols to support continuous improvement and contribute to the wider literature and knowledge base regarding blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision.
	12.13 Members of the programme team have opportunities to engage with colleagues working in other providers and relevant professional bodies and associations to help benchmark and improve their understanding of evolving good practice in the blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision.

4.3 Learner experience context

The focus of this section is on the provider's responsibility to support the learner, as cohorts, in groups and as individuals. It recognises that learner success depends on factors beyond what happens in the physical or virtual classroom. The benefits of flexibility offered for learners by blended, hybrid and/or online learning contexts bring with them challenges, including affective and wellbeing issues influencing retention, progression, and completion, which require fit-for-purpose learning support and development services and resources.

Accessibility is crucial to learner success. Many learners with specific learning needs or disabilities choose to study online and there should be appropriate procedures in place to help identify their needs and support their requirements. Depending on a learner's background there can be literacy and numeracy requirements, including supporting digital skills, that need to be developed as part of or alongside the programme of study. Appropriate interventions and mechanisms to identify learners requiring additional support or who may be struggling should be in place, particularly for online learning programmes where students may not have a supportive peer network. Providers should also have procedures or referral mechanisms that enable learners to access career and counselling services where appropriate.

It is important that procedures are in place to inform learners how blended, hybrid and/or online learning may differ from their previous learning experiences; that they are appropriately prepared for it; that they know how to access learning support and development services, and that their progress and engagement is monitored, encouraged, and supported. When thinking about study learners should be able to pre-assess their own readiness to engage with blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes. This readiness includes their current skills, previous experience, whether they have adequate access to the Internet and related digital technologies, and their ability to be an effective online learner. It also considers time for study and personal and family circumstances, both crucial factors for learner success in online learning programmes.

The level of flexibility afforded to individual learners needs to be clear in the conditions of study for the programme. Providers need to ensure the programme is adequately described and there are clear expectations regarding attendance during synchronous activities. Similarly, expectations for learners accessing the institution's LMS/VLE on a weekly basis should be explicit. It follows that learners need to be given clear information on the hours when academic, technical, or affective support is available. This information helps teachers to set clear boundaries for their engagement with learners, especially outside of normal working hours.

Overall, the principle of equivalency[23] is central to supporting online learners as they should be able to access the same quality and provision of academic advice, learning support and development services and affective care as students who learn through a more traditional on-site or on-campus study mode. This principle should guide decisions about service provision for online learners, with a 'digital first'[24] approach now a defining feature of good practice in well-resourced efforts to promote learner success, high levels of engagement, and foster a strong sense of belonging when studying in blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes.

[23] In this context, equivalency refers to providing all learners with the same level of access to learning support and development services even though the mechanism of access may need to different due to the study mode.

[24] In this context, the term 'digital first' refers to thinking about digital service provision as the default option and choosing to offer offline services only when they offer a clear advantage over digital provision.

LEARNER EXPERIENCE CONTEXT	
Scoping Statement	The Learner Experience Context focuses on the learner, the choices they make and whether the support and development services and related [digital] resources designed to promote high levels of engagement, learner success and wellbeing are fit-for-purpose. It establishes whether procedures are in place to ensure learners are adequately informed about the programme and aware of both online and offline learning support and development services available to them, with a particular focus on supporting study readiness, equality of opportunity and positive outcomes for learners based on learner-centred and good practice principles for blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision.
13. Thinking about Study	
Good Practice Statement	Prospective learners have the appropriate information to make informed choices about whether a particular programme of study is the best fit for them, given the conditions and their personal circumstances when considering engaging in a blended, hybrid and/or online learning course.
Good practice is supported and reflected by:	13.1 Prospective learners are supported to make informed choices about participating in any programme supported by digital education and are aware from the outset of the necessary skills, pre-knowledge, and technology requirements they will need to be successful in achieving the learning outcomes (e.g., level of Internet access and any prescribed hardware or software).
	13.2 There is a mechanism for learners to test if their Internet access and hardware meets the technological requirements to participate in the blended, hybrid and/or online learning programme.
	13.3 Prior to committing to a particular blended, hybrid and/or online learning programme, prospective learners are made aware of all the terms and conditions relevant to that programme – ideally in a written form and during discussion with the provider. This information might include: • programme fees • rules concerning fee payments and refunds • eligibility rules for fee waivers and scholarships • official documentation required by the provider

- any specified timings for synchronous interaction
- consequences of not meeting assessment deadlines and procedures for appealing results
- expectations governing flexibility for learners, such as the regularity of attendance or re-assessment opportunities
- regulations in terms of alleged plagiarism, breaches of academic integrity and rules against fraud or other forms of cheating

13.4 Information is available before learners commit to studying that adequately explains the academic requirements of the blended or online learning programme to help assess its suitability in terms of their goals and personal circumstances. This information in advance of commencing should include:

- the programme learning outcomes
- key dates for the start and end of study
- description of the teaching, learning and assessment methods
- clarity on the specific level of engagement expected for online synchronous and/or asynchronous elements
- details of any mandatory or voluntary attendance or participation in both live online synchronous and face-to-face activities
- expectations in terms of regularly accessing the LMS/VLE and use of related asynchronous resources
- statement about accessibility of online content and experiences to reassure learners with specific learning needs or disabilities
- amount of time each week learners are expected to commit to independent learning
- outline of the types of assessment tasks and requirements for any collaborative group work
- information on how assessment will be submitted and how long it will take to receive feedback
- the ways in which assignment work will be judged and the relative weighting in respect of assessment what quality assurance processes are in place to give confidence in the currency and standing of the programme

Online Programmes	For online programmes, information **must** be available on whether learners can access onsite services such as the library, maths or writing centre and if there any voluntary face-to-face class gatherings.

13.5 Prior to commencing a blended, hybrid and/or online learning programme, learners have information on the GDPR compliance of the digital tools and platforms they will be expected to use and how their personal data will be used and who has access to it (e.g., LMS/VLE logs that can be used to monitor learner activity).

DRAFT

	13.6 Information is available about any unique identifiers and the related protocols and processes that will form part of the validation of the learner's identity and enable them to access the LMS/VLE and digital learning materials and resources in good time at the start of their programme.	
	13.7 Learners are informed, where appropriate, about any third-party arrangements and the respective responsibilities of each party, such as local study centres or administrative offices, that may be involved in delivering and supporting the blended, hybrid and/or online learning programme.	
	13.8 Prospective learners should be able to participate in an on-site, on-campus or online information event where they can talk with people who can explain different programmes and what they may reasonably expect when studying in a blended, hybrid and/or online learning context.	
	13.9 Learners should be able to participate in a welcome or orientation event at the start of a programme supported by digital education, which clearly specifies and provides explicit information about what they may reasonably expect during their programme of study.	
	Online Programmes	For online programmes, learners **must** be able to participate in a virtual welcome or orientation event at the start of their study and this should be digitally recorded for those unable to join any live synchronous event.

14. Learning Support and Development	
Good Practice Statement	Consistent with the principles of equivalency and digital-first, well-resourced and fit-for-purpose learning support and development services, and related resources, are available to all learners, they are fully aware of what they can access, both online and offline, and make effective use of them when needed to support their wellbeing, chances of success and ability to achieve the programme learning outcomes.
Good practice is supported and reflected by:	14.1 The provider's learning support and development services, and related resources, are well-resourced, fit-for-purpose and continually updated in response to changing technology.
	14.2 Learning support and development services are adaptive and responsive to ongoing learner needs, tailored to the point of need and programme of study, and the stage of the study lifecycle.

	14.3 There is a purposeful mix in the provision of learning support and development services for learners engaged in programmes supported by digital education, with a strong commitment to digital-first access where there are clear advantages.	
	Online Programmes	For online programmes, there **must** be equivalency in the provision of learning support and development services to ensure equity of access and learners are not disadvantaged from those studying through other modes.
	14.4 Learners are aware of what academic, technical or affective learning support and development services are available, know how and when they can access them (e.g., the hours, times and contact details), and understand the conditions associated with their use, including matters of privacy and confidentiality.	
	14.5 Learners who are completing shorter forms of learning and micro-credentials through a blended, hybrid and/or online learning context are informed and understand whether they can access the provider's full range of learning support and development services.	
	14.6 Learners are supported from an early stage of their study to develop critical digital skills and other necessary independent study skills to be effective online learners.	
	14.7 Learners are supported from an early stage and throughout their study to develop their reading, writing, maths, and library skills to progress towards becoming successful lifelong learners.	
	14.8 Learners are supported from an early stage and throughout their study to understand the principles of academic integrity, including ethical conduct, expectations concerning the correct citation of sources and the use of AI-generated products, and how to appropriately apply them in practice.	
	14.9 An appropriate range of affective support is available for learners, including a mix of online and offline prayer, mindfulness, counselling and wellbeing services and provision for career guidance.	
	14.10 Welcome or orientation events at the start of a programme of study include information and helpful resources on the different types of academic, technical, and affective supports available to learners.	
	14.11 Learners have opportunities to participate in [online] drop-in clinics or information sessions to help orient them to the library and to develop their information literacy and academic integrity.	
	14.12 Learners have opportunities to participate in [online] drop-in clinics or information sessions to familiarise them with core digital tools and platforms and to develop their digital literacy.	

DRAFT

	14.13 There are strategies and early indicators to identify learners who may be struggling and prompt and appropriate interventions to support their progress and ability to achieve the programme learning outcomes.
	14.14 There is regular monitoring and reporting on the uptake and effectiveness of learning support and development services and evaluation data contributes to service enhancements and continuous improvements.

15. Equality of Opportunity	
Good Practice Statement	Consistent with learner-centred principles, teaching, learning and assessment practices and associated activities and resources provide every learner with an equitable, fair and realistic opportunity to achieve the intended learning outcomes—irrespective of the study mode.
Good practice is supported and reflected by:	15.1 All learners have an equitable, fair and realistic opportunity to achieve the intended learning outcomes based on the principle of equivalency.
	15.2 Teachers and those who support teaching have professional development opportunities to learn how to mitigate the risks of unconscious bias when designing the curriculum, engaging with learners, and judging the quality of assessment work.
	15.3 The LMS/VLE and associated digital tools and learning materials and resources are reviewed to confirm that every effort has been made to make them accessible to all learners, including those with disabilities and specific learning needs.
	15.4 The online learning environment is safe, with explicit protocols that promote dignity, courtesy, and respect in digital interactions between teachers and learners, with particular sensitivity to gender, identity, religious, cultural and political beliefs, indigenous and Traveller community customs, and the circumstances of people who may be refugees or international protection applicants.
	15.5 Learners can display without fear, apprehension, or recrimination different gender pronouns in the online learning environment and when communicating with teachers and fellow learners.
	15.6 There are appropriately trained and nominated online moderators who understand and have the authority to intervene and follow up in cases of cyber bullying that may constitute risk to learners, teachers and/or the provider.

	15.7 There are deliberate steps taken to assist every learner to understand their responsibility to actively engage with the online learning opportunities provided and shape their own learning experience whilst supporting other learners.
	15.8 The timing of live synchronous activities does not restrict learners who are working or studying outside of Ireland in different time zones from engaging in online learning experiences and there are explicit protocols for recording and who can view such activities.
	15.9 A clear policy or shared expectation is communicated to learners concerning whether they must be visible with their cameras on during all parts of live synchronous activities, with rules or guidelines concerning acceptable background images.
	15.10 Every learner is supported to monitor their own progress and achievement through regular opportunities to test their knowledge and understanding, reflect on feedback and engage in dialogue with teachers and/or their peers.
	15.11 Assessment marking and moderation arrangements are valid, reliable, and fair and provide learners with timely and appropriate confidential feedback (and feedforward) on their progress.
	15.12 There are appropriate protocols to monitor the level of online engagement in blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes and follow up strategies in cases where the teacher's presence or level of interactivity does not meet expected standards.
	15.13 Learners have confidence that constructive feedback provided during regular evaluations of their blended. Hybrid and/or online learning experience is acted upon and contributes to continuous improvements.
	15.14 A student body, group or union has representation at both the provider level and in the programme board or governance structure and is regularly consulted when establishing policies, procedures, and practices for the design of learner-centred programmes supported by digital education.
	15.15 Learning support and development services are actively promoted to the student body, group or union through appropriate channels, and they are represented in the monitoring of such initiatives, with opportunities to partner with the provider, where appropriate, in offering specific services such as the development of digital skills or academic integrity.
	15.16 Learners are provided with advance information about the dates of planned upgrades or outages to the LMS/VLE and other digital tools and platforms, with enhancements and regular maintenance work deliberately scheduled to minimise any disruptions or disadvantages to study time.

DRAFT

16. Learner Experience and Outcomes	
Good Practice Statement	Consistent with fostering a culture of continuous improvement, the provider demonstrates a commitment to enhancing the learner experience supported by evidence and strives to promote student success, a strong sense of belonging and the ability and confidence to be effective online learners, which contributes to enhanced career prospects and professional outcomes.
Good practice is supported and reflected by:	16.1 There are deliberate steps taken throughout the learning journey to foster the learner's success, a strong sense of belonging to the provider, the programme of study, the related discipline, and their ability and confidence as an effective online learner.
	16.2 That progression, retention, and completion data for programmes supported by digital education together with achievement data inform evaluations and serve to benchmark the outputs and quality of the programme against other offerings.
	16.3 Learner satisfaction data is collected on a regular cycle and there is a mechanism to benchmark the results with other programmes supported by digital education to assess their performance and develop action plans for continuous improvements.
	16.4 The aggregated results of programme-wide evaluations are shared with learners and where appropriate external industry and community stakeholders to help validate any key trends or areas of concern, and to give confidence that the effort taken to provide such data contributes to meaningful dialogue and continuous improvements.
	16.5 Learners are fully aware of the procedures for making complaints when they are dissatisfied with some aspect of their blended, hybrid and/or online learning programme and every effort is made to resolve such complaints as quickly as possible.
	16.6 Learners who complete a blended, hybrid and/or online learning programme are regularly encouraged to participate in graduate destination and/or employability surveys to help assess its impact on them and the quality of the programme.
	16.7 Industry and community stakeholders who employ learners who complete programmes supported by digital education are regularly invited to participate in graduate satisfaction surveys to assess the quality and whether the learning outcomes are still fit-for-purpose.
	16.8 The provider is committed to supporting or undertaking research around the programme to build a culture of scholarship, document what works and why, and contribute more broadly to continuous improvements in the field of digital education.

SECTION 3: IMPLEMENTATION

5 Implementing the Guidelines

This document contains a comprehensive description of the types of quality assurance procedures and good practice considerations required of blended, hybrid and/or online learning providers. It is important to note that not all the individual guidelines will apply to every provider type as this depends on several factors, including their size, the qualification level, the number of learners, the educational context, and the plans and ambitions they have for future developments This last section shifts attention to the different ways providers can use these guidelines as appropriate to their context and accreditation and validation requirements. It also looks at how to document evidence to demonstrate the level of capability or maturity in terms of these guidelines for programmes supported by digital education.

5.1 How can providers use these guidelines?

While QQI Statutory Guidelines play a specific role under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012, these topic specific guidelines have been constructed to help *guide*, *monitor,* and *enable* Irish providers to respond to the evolving nature of good practice in blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision. They navigate the ground between public accountability and serving an educational role to help support providers self-assess their own capacity and capability to develop quality programmes supported by digital education. The intention is that the guidelines trigger quality conversations within providers and help to identify current gaps and suggest areas for further investment or future development. Importantly, given rapid and ever-changing developments in digital technologies and the affordances they offer teaching, learning and assessment, the guidelines provide a direction of travel rather than a definitive quality assurance playbook for providers. Quality blended, hybrid and/or online learning remains complex, with no simple recipe for good practice. For this reason, providers are encouraged to focus on the quality assurance considerations most relevant to their setting and, where useful, adapt the guidelines and develop tailored procedures specific to their context.

5.2 How might different providers use these guidelines?

For obvious reasons, a university is likely to use these guidelines differently from a large private provider or small independent training organisation. After all, Irish universities have more statutory independence and are required to meet European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), which apply to all higher education offered in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), in whatever format, duration or study mode (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education et al., 2015)[25]. Accordingly, universities and other higher education institutions (HEIs) would be advised to use the guidelines and take cognisance of the good practice indictors alongside existing European and industry professional standards to meet validation and accreditation requirements where they elaborate on specific aspects of quality assurance for blended, hybrid and online learning. Large HEIs may also take advantage of the guidelines to undertake cyclical programme and institution-wide self-assessment of their digital education provision to promote quality enhancement, benchmarking with other providers and for planning of future developments.

On the other hand, a private provider has a formal statutory obligation to apply the guidelines in demonstrating how they meet QQI *Core Statutory QA Guidelines.* While the guidelines are supplementary, they elaborate on many of the existing domains covered by the Core Guidelines, which existing providers will

[25] European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education et al. (2015), *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*, http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf.

already have quality assurance procedures in place to meet. In many cases, providers will already have procedures that address the previous QQI *Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes.* Hence, private providers are advised to review their existing quality assurance procedures and update them where necessary in accordance with the relevant good practice indicators contained in these guidelines for digital education. They should also be cognisant of areas where these new guidelines interface with QQI's other sector-specific and topic-specific QA guidelines. Some private providers may wish to map these guidelines for digital education provision to the framework for *European Quality Assurance for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET),* and the related ten reference indicators (European Commission, 2014)[26]. These new QQI guidelines can also be used by providers to demonstrate how they meet industry accreditation requirements, especially if there are quality concerns about online delivery. Additionally, the guidelines may help providers relatively new to digital education to self-assess their readiness and identify gaps for further training and development.

A small independent training provider also has a statutory obligation to apply the guidelines in demonstrating how they meet QQI *Core Statutory QA Guidelines.* However, the scale of operation and number of learners and programmes supported by digital education is likely to mean that many good practice indicators are less applicable to their context. For this reason, small independent providers should identify the quality dimensions most relevant to their operation and adapt or incorporate any new quality assurance procedures accordingly. This does not have to be a dauting task if providers focus on how they can demonstrate quality assurance of good practice focusing on the 16 domains across the three levels rather than being caught up in the specificity of each quality consideration. This point raises the question of how should providers go about documenting evidence of their quality assurance procedures to meet QQI requirements and build their capability to develop blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes? The last section addresses this question.

5.3 How can providers document evidence of their good practice?

The answer to the above question depends on how providers already engage in quality assurance and how the guidelines mesh with existing procedures. In recognition of this point, the scoping and good practice statements illustrate how the sum of the whole is greater than the individual parts. The intention is that the 16 Good Practice Statements provide a framing point of reference which help providers to respond to the guidelines in a more holistic manner, consistent with a contemporary approach to quality assurance focusing on building a culture of continuous improvement. They help providers keep sight of the bigger picture, especially when some of the specific quality indicators may not apply to them. While providers have some choice in how they wish to demonstrate their quality assurance procedures are fit-for-purpose for blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision, Appendix 6.2 offers example templates that encourage the collection of both narrative and numbers in response to the guidelines. Providers may wish to adapt these templates and use the 'emerging', 'developing' and 'mature' framework to help respond to QQI reporting requirements. The crucial point is not to become focused on the level of maturity itself, but to ensure there are clear plans in place, where required, to address gaps and to support ongoing plans and developments in digital education provision.

[26] European Commission (2014).*Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the implementation of the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training.* http://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/EU/XXV/EU/02/55/EU_25554/imfname_10467219.pdf

6 APPENDIX

6.1 How were the guidelines developed?

These guidelines were developed through a comprehensive review of the contemporary literature. Several seminal publications informed the guidelines, including a major meta-analysis of the quality literature on online learning (Singh & Thurman, 2019)[27] and an international review of quality assurance frameworks, benchmarking tools and indicators for digital higher education undertaken by the OECD (Staring, et al., 2022)[28]. A critical review of 20 different institutional self-assessment frameworks completed by the European Universities Association (Volungevičienė, et al., 2021)[29] along with a comprehensive analysis of quality assurance systems in Europe for digital higher education also informed the guidelines (Ubach & Henderik, 2023)[30]. Additionally, the guidelines were informed by several similar initiatives underway or published by other national quality assurance agencies.

Importantly, the guidelines reflect valuable input and feedback gathered through an online survey managed by QQI and four online listening sessions with Irish providers, educators, and learners. These sessions took place over October and November 2022. The core team from the National Institute for Digital Learning (NIDL) at Dublin City University (DCU) who were contracted to work with QQI in developing the guidelines also met with several individual groups and providers on request where they had specific concerns.

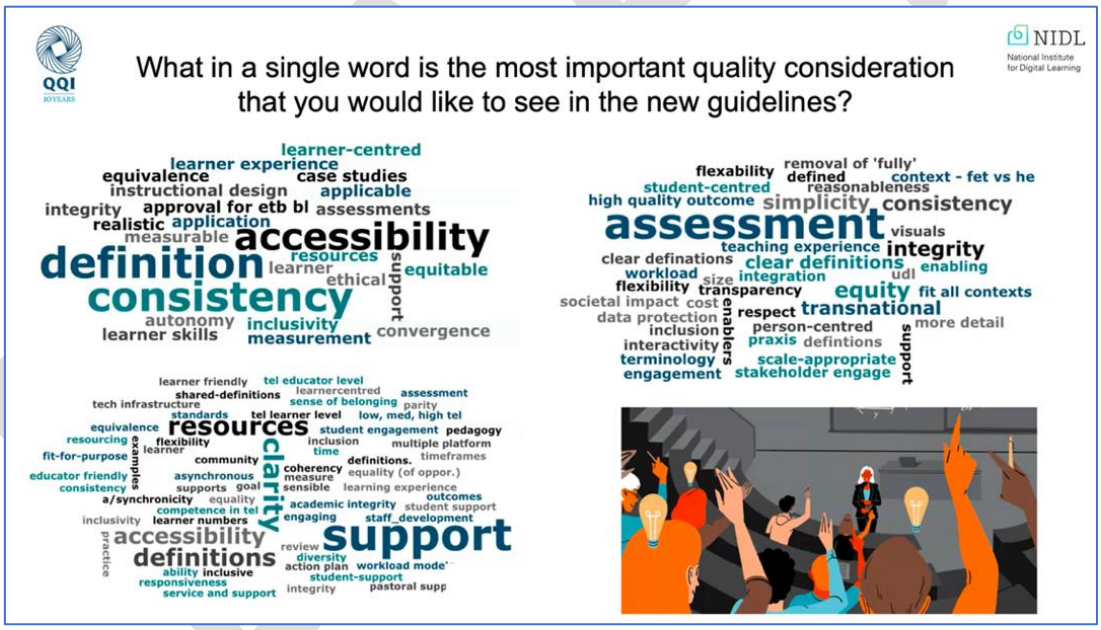


Figure 1: Feedback during stakeholder consultation listening sessions

[27] Singh, V., & Thurman, A. (2019). How many ways can we define online learning? A systematic literature review of definitions of online learning (1988-2018). *American Journal of Distance Education*, *33*(4), 289–306.

[28] Staring, F., Brown, M., Bacsich, P., & Ifenthaler, D. (2022). Digital higher education: Emerging quality standards, practices and supports, *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 281, OECD Publishing, Paris. https://doi.org/10.1787/f622f257-en.

[29] Volungevičienė, A., Brown, M., Greenspon, R., Gaebel, M., & Morrisroe, A. (2021). *Developing a High-Performance Digital Education System: Institutional Self-Assessment Instruments.* European University Association, Brussels.

[30] Ubachs, G., & Henderikx, P. (2023). Quality assurance systems for digital higher education in Europe. In: Zawacki-Richter, O., Jung, I. (eds), *Handbook of Open, Distance and Digital Education*. Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-2080-6_41

As the word cloud presented in Figure 1 illustrates, this part of the consultation process identified a diverse range of quality considerations, with the definition challenge along with Assessment, Accessibility and Learner Support standing out as key issues. Particular attention is given to these issues throughout the guidelines.

During the development of the guidelines, several conference presentations were given to share progress, validate quality indicators and seek feedback from the sector, including papers at the December 2022 *Irish Conference on Engaging Pedagogy*[31] and January 2023 *EdTech Winter Conference*[32] hosted by the Irish Learning Technology Association (ILTA). QQI directorate staff also provided feedback on a draft version of the guidelines, which resulted in numerous changes, including a decision to reframe the guidelines around the more contemporary concept of Digital Education. In March 2023, a white paper containing the second version of the guidelines was considered by QQI's Policy and Standards Committee before they were approved for sharing with the sector as part of a second round of consultation. Feedback on this version of the guidelines will be gathered though an online survey, with responses informing the final report.

[31] Brown, M., Costello, E., & Girme, P. (2022). *The quality challenge of digital education: Enabling [tertiary] education providers to make it work*. Paper at Irish Conference on Engaging Pedagogy, 8th December.

[32] Brown, M., Costello, E., & Girme, P. (2023). *The quality challenge of digital higher education: How are institutions and national QA agencies responding?* Presentation at EdTech Winter Conference, Irish Learning Technology Association, 27th January.

6.2 How could providers report on the guidelines?

The following examples provide indicative templates that providers may wish to use or adapt when reporting on the QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Programmes Supported by Distance Education. For each domain, providers are encouraged to consider whether their current provision is 'emerging', 'developing' or 'mature'. While these terms are not strictly defined, they indicate a general progression in the level of capacity or maturity under each level and domain.

EXAMPLE GUIDES REPORTING TEMPLATES	
ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT	
Scoping Statement	The Organisational Context focuses on strategic and institution-wide aspects of managing quality for programmes supported by digital education. It establishes whether appropriate procedures are in place for strategy, policies, regulations and administrative processes, finance, infrastructure, resources, training and professional development, institutional support, strategic collaboration, and partnerships, and for addressing issues related to learners studying outside of Ireland.
1. Strategy, Management and Implementation Plans	
Good Practice Statement	A clear vision, explicit strategy, and well-developed management plans address, build capacity and enable best practice for digital education provision.
Provider's Evidence	
2. Policies, Regulations and Administrative Processes	
Good Practice Statement	A clear set of policies, regulations and fit-for-purpose administrative processes address, support and enable best practice for blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision.

Provider's Evidence	
3. Finances, Infrastructure and Resources	
Good Practice Statement	The level of financial investment, type of IT infrastructure and available resources build capacity and enable best practice for blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision.
Provider's Evidence	
4. Staff Training, Professional Development and Institutional Support	
Good Practice Statement	The availability of staff training and professional development and the level of institutional support for teachers, and for those who support teaching and provide crucial administrative services, builds capacity, and enables best practice for blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision.
Provider's Evidence	
5. Strategic Collaborations and Partnerships	
Good Practice Statement	Strategic collaborations and partnerships that advance the institution's strategy for blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision are cognisant of, and consistent with, the Core Statutory QA Guidelines for all providers and topic- or sector-specific guidelines as appropriate.
Provider's Evidence	
6. Learners Outside of Ireland	

Good Practice Statement	Where learners reside outside of Ireland, due diligence and risk management arrangements are robust and fit-for-purpose and where teaching methods, student supports and administrative services need to be adapted to the local context, they follow the principles of equity, fairness and equivalency to ensure all learners can achieve the programme learning outcomes.
Provider's Evidence	

OVERALL SELF-ASSESSMENT FOR ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT		
Emerging	**Developing**	**Mature**
☐	☐	☐

PROGRAMME CONTEXT	
Scoping Statement	The Programme Context focuses on the programme as a whole and the approval and validation processes and whether the level, duration, and volume of credit are appropriate, the degree to which learning outcomes are responsive to changing work, industry or community needs and the study mode is fit-for-purpose. It establishes whether appropriate procedures are in place to follow the principles of good practice for blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision with overall coherence and constructive alignment between the learning outcomes and the curriculum design, including the teaching methods, learner interactivity, learning materials and resources, assessment and feedback practices, and evaluation strategies.
7. Programme Outcomes	
Good Practice Statement	The programme is appropriate to the NQF award-type, level, duration, and volume of credit, is responsive to changing work, industry or community needs, and the study mode and sequencing is fit-for-purpose so learners can clearly achieve the intended learning outcomes through blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision.
Provider's Evidence	
8. Approval and Validation Processes	

DRAFT

Good Practice Statement	Approval and validation processes for blended, hybrid and online learning programmes are fit-for-purpose, engage all key stakeholders, support robust decision-making, draw on business intelligence, address staffing and resourcing requirements, consider financial viability and sustainability, evaluate how the planned curriculum design, teaching methods and assessment strategies reflect learner-centred principles, and recognise the need for ongoing quality assurance.
Provider's Evidence	
9. Learning and Curriculum Design	
Good Practice Statement	The curricula for blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes follows learner-centred principles and an understanding of good practice that is informed by an explicit learning design model, approach or framework supporting constructive alignment to the intended learning outcomes, with purposeful consideration of the most appropriate and fit-for-purpose teaching, learning and assessment methods, and digital tools and platforms, for supporting high levels of interactivity between teachers and learners, learners and learners, and learners and their learning resources and materials.
Provider's Evidence	
10. Learning Resources and Materials	
Good Practice Statement	Well-equipped and supported media production facilities and digital tools are available to develop a variety of fit-for-purpose learning materials and resources and there is appropriate guidance on their effective use, including open educational resources (OER), based on the principles of accessibility and substitution, which are central to good practice for blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes.
Provider's Evidence	
11. Assessment and Feedback Practices	
Good Practice Statement	Assessment and feedback practices in programmes supported by digital education reflect the principles of Assessment OF/FOR/AS Learning and involve a variety of formative and summative assessment tasks, which reflect best practice in academic integrity and

	integrate, where appropriate, the affordances of digital tools and platforms in enabling learners to achieve the intended learning outcomes.
Provider's Evidence	
12. Evaluation and Continuous Improvement	
Good Practice Statement	Evaluation and continuous improvement strategies for blended, hybrid and/or online learning programmes are systemic and cyclical drawing on data from multiple sources, with clear evidence of how they inform future actions and development plans to enhance the quality of the curriculum to increase learner engagement, interactivity, and success.
Provider's Evidence	

OVERALL SELF-ASSESSMENT FOR PROGRAMME CONTEXT		
Emerging	**Developing**	**Mature**
☐	☐	☐

LEARNER EXPERIENCE CONTEXT	
Scoping Statement	The Learner Experience Context focuses on the learner, the choices they make and whether the support and development services and related [digital] resources designed to promote high levels of engagement, learner success and wellbeing are fit-for-purpose. It establishes whether procedures are in place to ensure learners are adequately informed about the programme and aware of both online and offline learning support and development services available to them, with a particular focus on supporting study readiness, equality of opportunity and positive outcomes for learners based on learner-centred and good practice principles for blended, hybrid and/or online learning provision.
13. Thinking about Study	

DRAFT

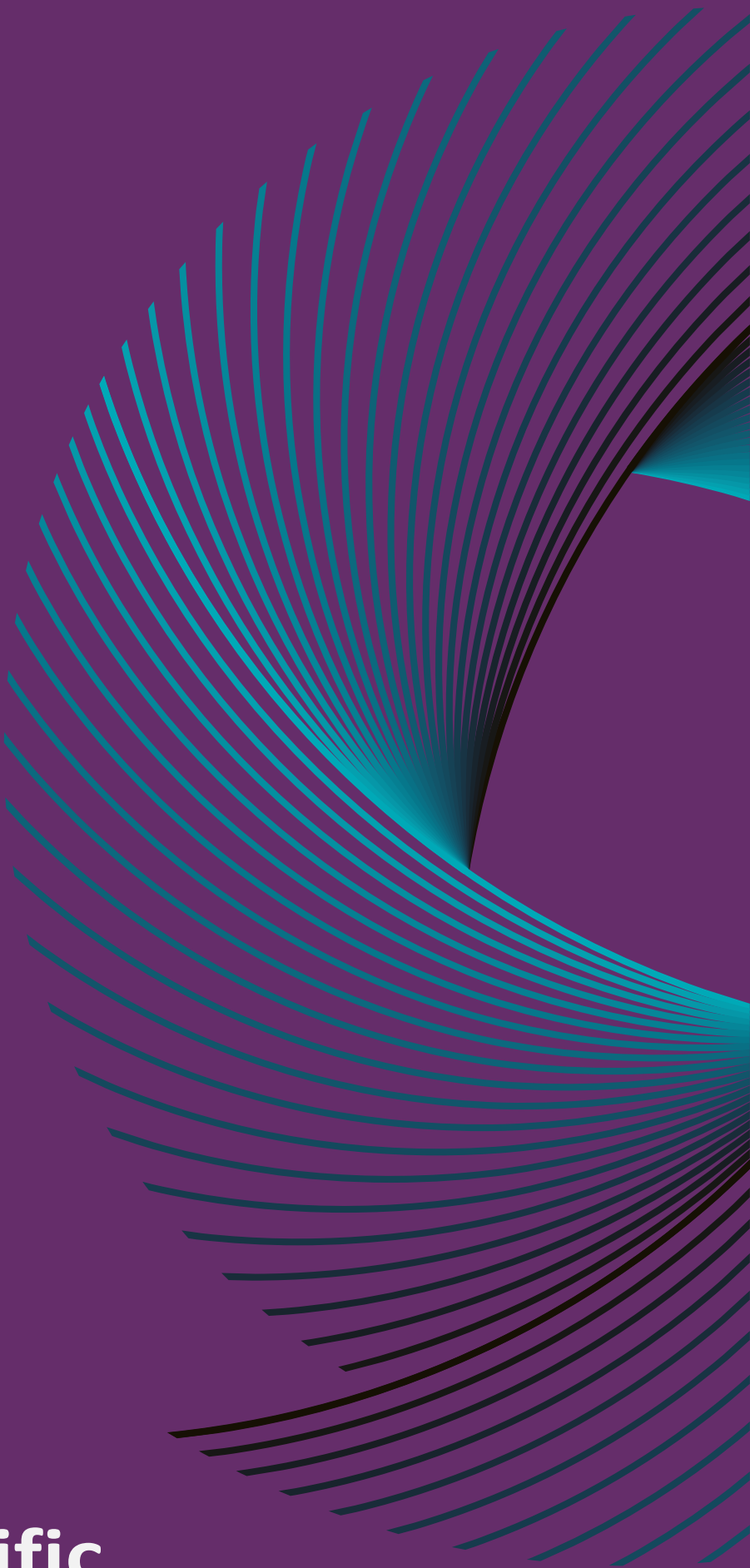
Good Practice Statement	Prospective learners have the appropriate information to make informed choices about whether a particular programme of study is the best fit for them, given the conditions and their personal circumstances when considering engaging in a blended, hybrid and/or online learning course.
Provider's Evidence	
14. Learning Support and Development	
Good Practice Statement	Consistent with the principles of equivalency and digital-first, well-resourced and fit-for-purpose learning support and development services, and related resources, are available to all learners, they are fully aware of what they can access, both online and offline, and make effective use of them when needed to support their wellbeing, chances of success and ability to achieve the programme learning outcomes.
Provider's Evidence	
15. Equity of Opportunity	
Good Practice Statement	Consistent with learner-centred principles, teaching, learning and assessment practices and associated activities and resources provide every learner with an equitable, fair and realistic opportunity to achieve the intended learning outcomes—irrespective of the study mode.
Provider's Evidence	
16. Learner Experience and Outcomes	
Good Practice Statement	Consistent with fostering a culture of continuous improvement, the provider demonstrates a commitment to enhancing the learner experience supported by evidence and strives to promote student success, a strong sense of belonging and the ability and confidence to be effective online learners, which contributes to enhanced career prospects and professional outcomes.

Provider's Evidence	

OVERALL SELF-ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNER EXPERIENCE CONTEXT		
Emerging	**Developing**	**Mature**
☐	☐	☐

SUMMARY OF SELF-ASSESSMENT ACROSS DOMAINS				
Context	**Description of Level of Maturity**	**Status of Development**		
Organisational		☐ Emerging	☐ Developing	☐ Mature
Programme		☐ Emerging	☐ Developing	☐ Mature
Learner Experience		☐ Emerging	☐ Developing	☐ Mature
Overall Summary		☐ Emerging	☐ Developing	☐ Mature

DRAFT



Topic Specific

www.QQI.ie

26-27 Denzille Lane
Dublin 2
D02 P266
Ireland