Document Reference #	IHRI-ADM-POL-011
Document Title	QA Policy and Standards for Online Teaching and Learning
Owner	QAPU Director
Version	1
Issue Date	01/07/2023
Next Review Date	01/07/2026

Contents

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

IHRI programmes are in a virtual learning environment (VLE). This includes virtual laboratories and spaces for students, academics, and subject matter experts to create, develop and test ideas and projects in an international forum. This flexibility will tackle more than just knowledge transfer; it will create online communities that promote support ideas from the IHRI community in a safe and secure environment.

This document is a step towards implementing this initiative as it will provide standards and guidelines to IHRI Management, Academics and non-academics (e.g. the IT Department and administrative staff).

DEFINITIONS

TERM OR ABBREVIATION	DEFINITION
Asynchronous Learning	Learning occurs when the educator and the learners are not communicating and engaging in real time.

Blended Learning	A formal education programme in which learners engage at least in part through **online delivery** of content and instruction with some element of learner control over time, place, path and/or pace, and at least at a supervised brick-and-mortar location with face-to-face interaction away from home. The ratio between online and face-to-face learning is decided by the educator and/or the programme based on the related pedagogical principles and the programme's needs, but both modes are complementary.
Computer-based Learning	Learning in which computing devices constitute the main tool for the transfer of knowledge, skills, competencies, assessment, and the general administration of learning.
Digital Learning	Learning where electronic devices such as computers that work process data are the main tool used in teaching and learning (similar to computer-based learning).
Distance Learning	Also known as e-learning or online learning, it is a form of education in which teachers and students are physically separated. The educator and learner communicate via telecommunication or services like mail. In the 21st century, the term has been replaced by e-learning as almost all distance learning is based on electronic communication, such as the Internet. This electronic communication needs to lead to learning based on pedagogical principles to be accepted as learning; otherwise, it is simply a means of communication. E.g. email correspondence between a supervisor and learner doing research is not e-learning but simple communication using the Internet. However, a video/audio conference call between the two to discuss research methods and provide feedback does constitute e-learning over distance.
e-Learning	Teaching and learning supported by information and communication technologies (ICT) through electronic devices
Face-to-face Learning	Learning is when the educator and the learner are in the same physical space and thus face each other during interaction. This is the traditional mode of learning, in which educators and learners need to agree on a fixed time and place to engage in teaching and learning.
Mobile Learning	Teaching and learning are delivered primarily through mobile computing devices such as smartphones and tablets.
Online Learning	Teaching and Learning supported by the Internet
Synchronous Learning	When the educator and the learners engage in real-time.
Ubiquitous Learning	Anywhere, anytime, teaching and learning are made possible with technology that eliminates the barriers of physical space.
Learning	Teaching and learning that uses the World Wide Web (Internet), to support face-to-face learning to create opportunities for online collaboration and the executing of tasks that lead to learning. This includes giving learners the opportunity to instructional watch videos online, research websites and access other resources on the World Wide Web that provide learners with another opportunity to enhance their learning with traditional non-digital means such as reading printed texts
Digital Literacy or Competence	The ability to access, manage, understand, integrate, communicate, evaluate and create information safely and appropriately through

	digital technologies for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship. It includes competence that is variously referred to as computer literacy, ICT literacy, information literacy and media literacy.
Digital Technologies	Any product or service that can be used to create, view, distribute, modify, store, retrieve, transmit, and receive information electronically in a digital form is a digital technology. In this framework, "digital technologies" is the most general concept, comprising computer networks, hardware, software, and content.
Digital Skills	The ability to handle, operate, set up and/or program digital devices.
Digital Tools	Digital technologies are used for a purpose or for carrying out a particular function, such as information processing, communication, content creation, safety, or problem-solving.
e-Portfolio	Collections of (students') work can advance learning by providing a way for them to organise, archive, display and reflect on their work. E-portfolios are both demonstrations of users' abilities and platforms for their self-expression.
e-Skills	Same as Digital Skills
Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)	Computers, mobile phones, digital cameras, satellite navigation systems, electronic instruments and data recorders, radio, television, computer networks, satellite systems or almost anything that handles and communicates information electronically. ICT includes both the hardware (the equipment and the software (the computer programs in the equipment).
Learning Analytics	Learning analytics is the measurement, collection, analysis, and reporting of data about learners and their contexts to understand and optimise learning and its environments.
Learning Management System	A software application for web-based technology used to plan, implement, and assess a learning process. It allows a teacher to create and deliver content, monitor student participation, and assess student performance. It is also referred to as Virtua Learning Environment.
Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)	A free, web-based distance learning programme aimed at enrolling many people worldwide.
Open Educational Resources	Teaching and educational resources that are openly licensed and available free of charge.
Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)	A software application or web-based technology is used to plan, implement, and assess a learning process. It allows a teacher to create and deliver content, monitor student participation, and assess student performance. It is also referred to as a Learning Management System (LMS).

2.0 Educational Standards For Online Quality Teaching, Learning And Assessment

2.1 General standards for e-learning

a) Online learning can occur synchronously or asynchronously under the supervision of the assigned academic/s. In asynchronous learning, the engagement between students and the academic is not

live but done through communication tools such as an online forum, email and other messaging systems.

b) Both students and academics shall receive adequate and timely educational support to maximise the use of e-learning tools and opportunities.
c) Academic staff must use the IHRI intranet maintenance request portal to log their requests for IT support at the Faculty Hub.
d) Academics are entitled to Continuous Professional Development in the educational, technical, and administrative aspects of delivering courses online.
e) Academics are not expected to provide first-line technical support to their students while delivering e-learning. However, academics should strive to help students in using e-learning tools if the academics feel they have the necessary knowledge and competence to do so. This will facilitate the smoother running of e-learning teaching and learning sessions.
f) Academics and students are expected to behave professionally in all aspects of digital communication and e-learning, in line with the IHRI regulations ('Student Code of Conduct and Faculty Code of Conduct) and the Laws of Malta.
g) Academics are expected to enforce acceptable student behaviour in e-learning and report to the relevant authorities within IHRI any such failure from students.
h) Academics shall respond to the students' online communications within a reasonable period of time. That is, academics shall follow up and respond to the student before or within the following lecture. It is to be noted that some tasks are created predominantly to encourage peer-to-peer input. Hence, the Lecturer's role is not necessarily to respond to each individual student but to probe and prompt further discussion.
i) Students are generally encouraged to keep the camera on throughout the online sessions. For a recorded session to take place, there must be the consent of all the participants. The consent can be registered and recorded by the Lecturer during the session rather than collecting signed forms. If full consent by students is not possible, the session can still be recorded, but the non-consenting students would have the right to turn off their cameras, and the Lecturer must take care of what questions are asked so that no personal information is recorded.

2.2 QA Compliance Standards for the delivery of full online courses

Courses with 100% online learning need to adhere to the following standards to be considered compliant with Quality Assurance standards.

2.2.1 Instructional design

An analysis of the learning needs and the use of appropriate strategies and methods to meet them. This includes clear aims and objectives, clear learning outcomes, assessment criteria, assessment strategy and a clear learning process.

2.2.2 Course opening – welcoming learners:

a) Accessibility – the academic gives clear instructions on accessing all elements of the online learning environment.
b) Role: The academic clearly explains his professional role in the learning environment and the role of the learners.
c) Description—A course description including prerequisites (if any), learning outcomes, assessment criteria, assessment strategy, and what is expected of the learners is also provided in terms of non-guided learning hours (self-study).
d) Behaviour – the learners are made aware of regulations, policies and ethics that govern the course.
e) Integrity – the academic is aware of and adheres to the academic integrity needed to facilitate learning.

f) Technical competencies – the learners are made aware of the technical competencies needed to successfully reach the learning outcomes.
g) Ownership – the academic allows learners to share their own learning goals.

2.2.3 Assessment of learning – determining what the learner has learnt and subsequent accreditation:

a) Goals and objectives – the learners know what is expected of them when assessed.
b) Strategies: internally verified, clear, well-defined, and measurable assessment of learning outcomes suited to the learners' level.
c) Grading – grades are given fairly and transparently through appropriate assessment instruments sanctioned by the institution.
d) Feedback – both academics and learners are allowed to provide feedback related to grading.
e) Management: Learners have access to their internally verified grades and feedback at all times so that they can track their learning progress.

2.2.4 Interaction and Community –

The exchanges between academics and learners build a community that supports teaching and learning:

a) Fostering: The academic welcomes learners, gives them the opportunity to communicate, and creates an online environment that fosters peer learning and engagement.
b) Management: Clear instructions, rules, and regulations support community building. While the academic facilitates engagement, learners are invested in taking ownership of community building.
c) Peer learning—Group work and other activities that foster peer learning are encouraged and structured not only to fulfil the learning outcomes but also to present learners with an opportunity to learn skills and competencies that go beyond such outcomes, e.g., digital literacy.

2.2.5 Instructional resources for teaching and learning:

a) Provision – learning materials are either provided by the academic or given enough time by the learners to procure such resources. The difference between compulsory and optional resources is to be made clear.
b) Application – the academic clearly explains how the resources will be applied and utilised.
c) Entitlement – The academic makes sure that the resources indicated to fulfil the learning outcomes are open and accessible by all the learners without unwarranted technical, financial or administrative barriers. The use of Open Educational Resources (free of charge) should be encouraged.
d) Variety—Learning resources vary in terms of multimedia content and multi-modal delivery channels to cater to learners' different learning preferences.
e) Openness – the academic should allow learners to suggest their own resources for adoption in the course.
f) Academic integrity—The academic promotes best practices in using third-party resources, including anti-plagiarism practices and sound academic research/writing practices.

2.2.6 Learner support – learners enabled to achieve their maximum potential:

a) Instructional support – the academic explains his/her role in the process.
b) Academic support—Learners know how to access support from the academic staff, the Student Hub, and Student Services to obtain mentoring, advice, and other skills that help them achieve the learning outcomes.
c) Technical support – learners know how to obtain technical support to overcome potential issues in accessing the learning area and achieving the learning outcomes.

d) Administrative support—Learners know how to obtain administrative support to overcome potential issues in accessing the learning area and achieving the learning outcomes.
e) Psycho-social support – learners know how to access psycho-social support directly or via Institute academic staff or Institute management.

2.2.7 Course evaluation – feedback to improve teaching and learning:

a) Entitlement – The Institute should allow learners to provide feedback on the whole learning experience. On the other hand, academics should also be able to provide feedback within their organisation.

2.2.8 Course closing:

a) Assessment – learners should have access to their internally verified assessment decisions and feedback after the course's closure via OpenSIS (and/or Classroom). The final grades should be provided within a reasonable timeframe after the course's closure.
b) Resolution – all pending issues between the academic and the learners are resolved.
c) Archiving—The academic ensures that the course/learning area resources, texts, communication, etc., are backed up or archived (in accordance with the institution's access policies) in a safe and secure way.

2.2.9 Instructional design cycle:

a) Academic review: The Academic Council and the Institute Management review the course structure and content, the experience gathered, and the student feedback.
b) Technical review: The Academic Council, with the relevant technical unit in the organisation, reviews the performance of the technical infrastructure used to deliver teaching and learning.
c) Administrative review – the academic, with the relevant administrative unit/s in the organisation, reviews the administrative processes supporting the delivery of teaching and learning.

2.3 General standards for online Time Constrained Assessment (TCA)

When setting up online TCAs, the Lecturer shall include an additional 'Connectivity Contingency Time Period' at the start and end of the TCA. This 'Connectivity Time Period' is intended to compensate students for any time lost when uploading and downloading documents due to low speeds or connectivity issues.

The 'Connectivity Contingency Time Period' shall include:

a) A maximum duration of 15 minutes before the start of the 'assessment time period (duration)' to allow for students to connect online and download the assessment brief and;
b) The students will have a maximum of 15 minutes at the end of the 'assessment time period (duration)' to upload the assessment material and complete any Google upload process.

The graphic below illustrates the above through an example:

Assessment Time Period' and 'Connectivity Contingency Time Period'		
Pre-Assessment Connectivity Contingency Time Period'	**Assessment Time Period (duration)**	**Post-Assessment Connectivity Contingency Time Period'.**
Duration: 15 mins (maximum)	Duration of assessment as indicated on Google Classroom Assessment section	Duration: 15 mins (maximum)

Table 1: Explanation of Assessment Connectivity Contingency Time Period, pre-Assessment and post-Assessment

Example for a 1-hour assessment duration		
Pre-Assessment Connectivity Contingency Time Period'	**Assessment Time Period (duration)'**	**Post-Assessment Connectivity Contingency Time Period.**
0845 hrs: Students are to connect and **access/download** the material required for the TCA.	**09:00 hrs:** Student to commence work on assessment. **10:00 hrs:** Student to stop working on TCA, save work and start the upload process. The timestamp of saved documents by the student cannot exceed 10:00 hrs.	**10:00hrs - 10:15 hrs:** Students need to complete the **upload process** by 10:15hrs **10:15hrs:** End of the window for student upload of material

Table 2: Example of pre and post-assessment contingency time for a 1-hour assessment

It is strongly recommended that, in addition to the standard good practice of including the start and end times of the online TCA on the assignment section in Google Classroom, the Lecturer also includes the post-assessment contingency connectivity start and end times. Hence, in the example provided above, the Lecturer also includes a note stating that the 'Post-assessment contingency connectivity time is from 10:00 hrs to 10:15 hrs. This time can only be used by the students to upload their assessments.

The Lecturer shall be available on-call during the TCA session per the usual procedure (for example, in the case above, from 09:00 to 10:00).

2.3.1 Downloading of TCA assessment brief, accessing online quiz etc.

Students are expected to start working on their assignment during the allocated 'Assessment Time Period' (as indicated on the assignment front sheet). However, they may use the 'Pre-Assessment Connectivity Contingency Time Period to:

- ensure they have a stable internet connection and;
- access/download the material required for the TCA.

Students who experience connectivity problems at the start of the TCA session and are either (a) not able to access (download) the TCA assignment brief document or (b) have problems accessing and completing the online TCA quizzes are required to immediately contact Student Services for further instructions and inform their lecturers accordingly. It is strongly advisable that students retain screenshots as evidence, where possible.

In these cases, Student Services shall consult with the Lecturer on whether a new window can be set up for the student to attempt the same TCA brief/quiz online.

In cases where, on the advice of the Lecturer, this second opportunity would prejudice the academic integrity of the TCA, the student will be offered by Student Services the opportunity to attempt the same TCA on the same day.

2.3.2 Uploading of material by the student

In the case of material that is saved and uploaded by the student, students are expected to stop working on their assignment at the end of the allocated 'Assessment Time Period' (as indicated in the assignment section on Google Classroom). Hence, the timestamp of saved work cannot exceed the allocated 'Assessment Time Period'.

The 'Last modified' time stamp (accessible via the 'File Info' properties) shall be within the 'Assessment Time Period' between 09:00 and 10:00hrs, in the example described above (unless the student has reported connectivity issues to the Institute and Lecturer).

The lecturer has the discretion to refuse any student submissions uploaded with a document timestamp that exceeds the allocated' Assessment Time Period' (that is, for example, between 10:01 hrs and 10:15 hrs in the case described above) unless the student has communicated prior notice of connectivity issues.

Students who experience problems uploading the assessment material must immediately contact Student Services and inform the Lecturer for further instructions. Student Services will direct the student accordingly.

IMPORTANT NOTE: The student must ensure that the saved file is not modified (and re-saved) after the end of the assessment time period, after 10:00hrs, in the example provided above.

Students should retain screenshots as evidence when experiencing connectivity problems.

Students must be familiar with internet connection speed tests to be provided as evidence when necessary. Links below refer.

Speed test by Ookla

3.0 Technological Standards For Online Quality Teaching, Learning And Assessment

3.1 Provision of hardware, software and infrastructure

3.1.1 Technology shall be at the service of teaching and learning in line with the following standards:

a) Support—All the utilised technologies and resources support the achievement of the academic aims and objectives and the learning outcomes for learners.
b) Centricity – all technologies and resources used to support a learner-centric rather than an academic-centric educational approach. The learners must be in control, and technology must assist them in achieving the learning outcomes.
c) Openness – the technical infrastructure used to deliver the teaching and learning is procured and implemented according to open standards and formats that maximise the value for money and the range of options to fulfil the learning outcomes and the academic needs of faculty and learners.
d) Authentication—authentication at different levels (device, software, virtual learning environment, specific course/learning area) should provide access to a safe and secure teaching and learning environment with the minimum number of steps possible to access the learning areas.
e) Access—The virtual learning environment/learning area is accessible through different software platforms, browsers, and computing devices. The academic provides alternative resources if any of these are not easily accessible for technical reasons related to the special needs of learners.
f) Interface—The user interface and navigation in the learning area are simple enough to be conducive to teaching and learning without the need to possess advanced ICT skills and competencies.
g) Investment—The technical requirements of the instructional resources and the virtual learning environment/learning space do not require learners to make any significant new investment in hardware, software, or online services to access and use these resources to fulfil the learning outcomes.

h) Management – Rules, regulations and policies at the institutional and learning community level that govern the use of the technological infrastructure supporting e-learning are accessible via the IHRI Student and Faculty Hubs.

3.2 The official IHRI tools: Google Classroom VLE, Google Education and OpenSIS

a) Google Classroom VLE, Google Education and OpenSIS are the official tools to deliver e-learning at IHRI from an educational and administrative aspect for all staff and students registered at IHRI. IHRI shall provide an @ihri.edu.eu email address to all registered full-time and part-time students.
b) IHRI shall provide adequate educational, technical and administrative support for using this and other hardware, software and services sanctioned by IHRI.
c) Academics are welcome to use their own hardware, software and services to attain the learning objectives and outcomes of the courses they deliver. However, IHRI cannot guarantee full academic, technical and administrative support on systems that are not officially used.

4.0 Malta Further And Higher Education Authority (MFHEA)

The Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA) issues standards and guidelines for delivering all types of learning in Higher Education.

In case of conflict, the interpretation of MFHEA standards regarding e-learning shall overrule the interpretation of this document. These IQA standards are available here: MFHEA Internal Quality Assurance Standards.

In terms of blended and e-learning, MFHEA has published a glossary of terms, which can be found in the definition section above. IHRI is adopting these terms and their definitions, which are replicated in Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms.

APPENDIX / REFERENCES

MFHEA Internal Quality Assurance Standards