

## Online and Blended Learning Policy (ED-Pol-027)

<b>Document Title</b>	Online and Blended Learning Policy
<b>Document Number</b>	ED-Pol-027
<b>Version</b>	1.0
<b>Department</b>	Education Development Department
<b>Owner/Responsible for Implementation</b>	Education Development Manager
<b>Approving Body</b>	Academic Board
<b>Effective date:</b>	February 2021
<b>Next Review date:</b>	February 2023
<b>Related Documents</b>	<p>ED-Pol-026 – Programme Development Policy</p> <p>ED-Pol-062 – Teaching and Learning Policy</p> <p>DP-Pol-090 – Data Protection Policy</p> <p>ED-SOP-083 - Learner Feedback Policy and Procedure</p> <p>ED-SOP-029 – Curriculum Development Procedure</p> <p>ED-SOP-030 – Online and Blended Learning Procedure</p>

## 1. Purpose

This policy outlines RCPI's commitment to excellence in the provision of online, and blended learning components in programmes within the organisational quality assurance framework. This policy sets out RCPI's approach to the design of online, and blended learning components.

- Online learning is 'A form of distance education in which a programme is intentionally designed in advance to be delivered fully online. Faculty use pedagogical strategies for instruction, Learner engagement, and assessment that are specific to learning in a virtual environment.' as defined by Bates, A.W. (2015)
- Blended learning is "the integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences" as defined by Garrison and Kanuka (2004:96).

The purposes of this policy are threefold:

- to provide a framework for RCPI Faculty and staff when developing, designing, evaluating, maintaining and reviewing online, and blended learning modules.
- to provide guidance on instructional design for this type of teaching and learning
- to ensure that RCPI has the appropriate resources, supports and technical infrastructure for online, and blended learning modules.

## 2. Scope

This policy applies to all Faculty and staff engaged in the design and development of online, and blended learning modules/programmes offered by RCPI.

## 3. Responsibilities

The Manager of the Education Development department is responsible for the implementation of this policy.

## 4. Online and Blended Learning – Guiding Principles

- 4.1 RCPI is committed to exploring and adopting new technologies where they enhance learning.
- 4.2 RCPI ensures that quality assurance systems to monitor and moderate standards are fit-for-purpose in online and blended learning contexts.
- 4.3 RCPI recognises that delivery of education programmes and modules, through an online or blended media necessitates the development of new pedagogical approaches and support structures.

- 4.4 RCPI Faculty and staff keep up to date with emergent technologies and new pedagogical approaches through continuous professional development, attendance and participation at conferences and engaging in professional networks.
- 4.5 RCPI keeps abreast of developments in theories and models of online and blended learning through guidance issued by bodies such as the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (NFTL) and other bodies such as the Irish University Association Digital Education (IUADigEd) Enhancing Digital Teaching & Learning project.

#### **4.1 Design and Development**

- 4.1.1 RCPI's online and blended learning design is informed by RCPI's [Teaching, Learning and Assessment Framework \(ED-GL-061\)](#).
- 4.1.2 The development of materials for delivery in an online or blended context requires input from a wide range of subject matter, technical and pedagogical specialists. RCPI's organisational structure has the resources to ensure that technology supports the pedagogy. Online and blended learning is developed and delivered when either mode of delivery adds pedagogical value and enhances the learner experience.
- 4.1.3 RCPI's education development process is designed to ensure that all information that is critical to the development of an effective online or blended module or programme is captured using standardised templates and procedures.
- 4.1.4 RCPI ensures that online and blended learning developments are learner centred and subject matter led rather than technology led. Subject specific and educational scholarship informs the pedagogy and instructional design.
- 4.1.5 All RCPI programme boards include a learner representative to ensure the learning resources, materials and delivery mechanisms are appropriate and fit-for purpose.
- 4.1.6 Learner feedback is crucial to the ongoing quality assurance and enhancement of RCPI's online and blended modules or programmes. All RCPI programmes provide a platform for learners to give their feedback on a multitude of factors regarding the programme and its content as outlined in Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review (Chapter 11).
- 4.1.7 RCPI ensures that online components deliver an interactive learning experience appropriate to the academic content.
- 4.1.8 Online and blended learning require learner effort across a range of activities which contact hours do not capture in full.
- 4.1.9 RCPI ensures its online and blended components are accessible to learners with disabilities in accordance with [Reasonable Accommodation Policy \(ED-Pol-084\)](#). As such, the principles of universal design apply to all online and blended learning programmes offered by RCPI.

4.1.10 All online and blended components provided by RCPI undergo end user testing.

## **4.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment**

4.2.1 RCPI ensures online assessment methods are fit for purpose, allowing learners to demonstrate the extent to which the Minimum Intended Programme Learning Outcomes (MIPLOs) have been achieved. There is further information on assessment within the [Assessment Policy \(ED-Pol-076\)](#).

4.2.2 RCPI ensures that reliable systems and processes are in place to verify the identity of learners and to manage remote assessments, even across time zones.

## **4.3 Online and Blended Learning Resources**

4.3.1 RCPI ensures that remote learning is enhanced by technology and provides learners with access to best-in-class Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

4.3.2 RCPI ensures appropriate investment in the VLE to support the use of diverse learning methodologies and activities to stimulate and optimise learner engagement as well as supporting timely provision of feedback in written, audio and video format.

4.3.3 RCPI ensures that the technical infrastructure supports accessibility of online and blended components for all learners.

4.3.4 RCPI ensures appropriate training and supports for all staff and faculty that utilise the VLE for the development of online components.

## **4.4 Learner Support**

4.4.1 Upon enrolment to an RCPI online or blended learning module or programme (where appropriate), learners are provided with access to a Learner Support webpage which includes:

- Guidance on the nature of autonomous learning
- Guidance on the collaborative and supported aspects of learning
- Access to learner specific academic policies and procedures
- Support for the development of digital skills
- Familiarisation with the RCPI VLE
- Details of who to contact within RCPI for help and support
- Other relevant resources

4.4.2 RCPI is committed to offering learners the support they require, including the technological and administrative elements which are specific to the blended and online learning environment.

- 4.4.3 RCPI provides all learners with administrative and educational support by way of the dedicated Programme Coordinator.
- 4.4.4 RCPI provides technical support to all learners through an IT Support Helpdesk. The hours of support are published on the RCPI website, together with contact details and working hours.
- 4.4.5 The Programme Coordinator provides all learners with access to resources, support, and guidance in relation to their programme of study.
- 4.4.6 RCPI's VLE maintains up-to-date learner records that are available for monitoring progression and achievement. RCPI's VLE provides learner data and insights to provide timely intervention for learners who may be struggling.
- 4.4.7 RCPI ensures that its policies and procedures are suitable for remote learners.
- 4.4.8 RCPI encourages online learner communication with faculty and peers. It is both encouraged and facilitated. RCPI nominates moderator(s) per programme who have authority to intervene in, for example, cyber bullying that may constitute risk to learners and/or the provider.
- 4.4.9 RCPI regularly seeks feedback, in line with the [Learner Feedback Policy and Procedure \(ED-Pol-083\)](#), about the learner experience and this is integral to the continuous quality improvement of online and blended modules. This feedback informs the type and level of support and learning resources provided.

## 4.5 Faculty Support

- 4.5.1 RCPI ensures that the profile of faculty is aligned with the requirements of blended and online learning, in accordance with the [Teaching Faculty Recruitment, Selection and Development Policy \(ED-Pol-057\)](#).
- 4.5.2 RCPI recognises that teaching on a blended or online module requires specific pedagogical and technical skills.
- 4.5.3 RCPI ensures that RCPI Faculty and staff are supported to function effectively and maximise the potential of digital technologies to enhance learning in the development and delivery of online components.
- 4.5.4 RCPI ensures that its Faculty and staff are provided with opportunities to develop technology enhanced teaching and learning skills and digital competencies and are offered training to enable proficiency in e-assessment methods.
- 4.5.5 On appointment, Faculty are provided access to a dedicated Teaching Faculty Homepage which offers a variety of teaching and learning resources including but not limited to:
- “How to” Tutorials on RCPI platforms used in the development of education programmes
  - Access to up to date, best practice guidelines from institutions such as; the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (NFETL)
  - Access to all RCPI QA policies and procedures
  - Access to Faculty related documentation

- Access to RCPI Helpdesk - Technical Support
- Information on providing support for learners in need

## 5. Reference Documents

Bates, A.W. (2015) Teaching in a Digital Age: Guidelines for Designing Teaching and Learning Vancouver BC: Tony Bates Associates Ltd. ISBN: 978-0-9952692-0-0.

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

Quality Qualifications Ireland (2013) Assessment and Standards, Revised 2013

[https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Assessment\\_and\\_Standards%20Revised%202013.pdf](https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Assessment_and_Standards%20Revised%202013.pdf)

ENQA (2015) Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)

[https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG\\_2015.pdf](https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf)

ENQA (2018) Considerations for Quality Assurance of E-Learning Provision

<http://www.enqa.eu/index.php/publications/papers-reports/occasional-papers>

Quality Qualifications Ireland (2016) Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines

<https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Core%20Statutory%20Quality%20Assurance%20Guidelines.pdf>

QQI Policies & Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education & Training (2017)

[https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Initial\\_Validation\\_policy\\_7\\_10\\_13.pdf](https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Initial_Validation_policy_7_10_13.pdf)

Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes (QQI 2018)

<https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Statutory%20QA%20Guidelines%20for%20Blended%20Learning%20Programmes.pdf>

National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (NFTL)

<https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/>

Irish Universities Association: Enhanced Digital Education & Learning

<https://www.iaa.ie/ourwork/learning-teaching/digital-learning/>