

Maynooth University

Collated feedback on the Topic-Specific Quality Assurance Guidelines for Blended Learning document from Maynooth University faculty teaching and learning committee.

Respondent 1

1. The document says we should review any quality procedure for blended learning. This seems to include the use of online learning environments (and I think that includes systems such as Moodle and Blackboard), and consequently means that any future quality reviews should include some comment on blended learning quality?
2. The document feels kind-of heavy weight, but if I understand correctly, it is a guideline to what should be considered rather than a set of mandatory rules. If adhered to too rigidly, could it put off a common use case where the online component is primarily an enhancement to face-to-face contact (e.g. by providing extra material, topical links, worked solutions, slides, lecture notes, ...) with an inappropriate level of formality?
3. Note that some university departments have integrated on-line learning with their regular teaching since the mid-to-late 90s and have a lot of experience of how to use it within their discipline (I'm thinking of physics, maths and computer science here). It might not make sense to ask people with 20 years experience to defer to consultants or require specific qualifications.
4. Some of the issues brought up are above my pay grade (e.g. resourcing, HR, legal), but they are clearly important when considering things like remote/international offerings. So, probably a useful check list - in fact, a 1-page checklist summary could be very useful.

Respondent 2

I thought that the Blended learning document was good.

P13 3.2.1 - "all systems use dare capable of ..." - it is sometimes difficult to identify the identity of learners and to avoid plagiarism;

P15 3.3.2 - last bullet point - who should evaluate the quality of the resources?

P19 4.1.4 - I would worry that curricula would be developed by people who are not subject experts. Maybe this point could state that a development team should consult the other internal experts?

P21 4.3.1 second bullet point - I'm not sure that external consultants should be so prominent. First and third bullet point - it would be good to have more staff training in these areas but I'm not sure we can make it a prerequisite.

P22 4.3.7 - Feedback - the comment about face to face and written feedback could be seen as a bit derogatory.

P27 5.2.3 - I'm not sure we can stipulate the qualifications of staff like this.

Respondent 3

I had a read through the infrastructure section and nothing stood out to me as being unreasonable or surprising.

Respondent 4

1. There is an interesting question here about the real target of the document. Does it apply to individual traditional modules that wish to incorporate some element of blended learning, or only as a set of guidelines for best practice in blended learning courses that are designed as blended from the outset? Clearly the latter is intended, but they may impact the former either intentionally or unintentionally.

For instance, as more and more traditional modules incorporate some element of blended learning, will credits need to be based partly on the usual metrics (contact time, self guided learning etc etc.), but they could also reflect an element of interactive exercises?

2. Section 3.1.2 - With regard to fees, it is opaque if they should be higher, lower or just reconsidered.

3. Section 3.1.2 With regard to "regulations and arrangements for Boards of Examiners and External Examiners include any additional consideration for online learning experiences", there could be many complicated issues to consider to somehow outline interactive experiences in narrative form or by providing live links to external examiners. Specific parameters for online assessment might be critical for accreditation (e.g. an MCQ may not be open online for an extended period, users may not change answers or questions may have to be randomised).

The document should reflect that the precise protocol for learning and assessments need to be provided for external examiners and placed in the context of the learning objectives.

4. Technical support will be huge - who supplies this - the relevant Department or Institution? This is not necessarily an issue for this document but it is a concern for any institution trying to implement this document.

5. Section 4.2.1 - peer commentary on course content is not typically required in third level institutions. There is a risk to academic freedom here. However, the document seems to regard courses not as the pedagogical product of experts but the commercial product of institutions constructed by consulting multiple experts. This view has some risk of only teaching received wisdom. Such regulations should be careful not to erode the ability of staff expertise to deliver more exciting and demanding modules, which depend on the expertise and skills of the specific staff member delivering the module.

More generally, the peer learning requirement seems to have to do with institutional reputation and the idea that online learning is not seen as being delivered by a academic or team of academics but by the institution for whom the academic staff merely serves as resource managers rather than as a pedagogue.

It is also suggested that all materials must be owned by an academic department. But that is often not true - they can be owned by the individual who creates them. This is a well tested model in academic institutions (but it can be circumvented with contracts and where the staff are clearly hired to create courses for a third party).

This can be understandable as a course needs to survive changes in individual staff members, but it is a short way from the idea of the pedagogue as expert and that is very concerning.

If the aim of the document is to frame the pedagogue as an online forum manager who delivers entirely predetermined content, this is highly undesirable! While blended learning has advantages in terms of commercial efficiency and reach of education, we do need to keep in mind that there is good reason to believe it has as many disadvantages as advantages in terms of learning gradients.

6. Section 4.3.2 sees the modules as institutional and predating staff appointments - staff being later hired to deliver the already designed content. I'm not sure this is a model that many lecturers will be happy with.