

Policy Identifier: Blended and Online Learning and Quality Assurance Policy

Policy Title:	Blended and Online Learning and Quality Assurance Policy
Description:	This policy covers all programmes and courses offered by MIE, with respect to teaching, learning and assessment of programmes with a blended or online delivery component and is designed to safeguard the academic standards associated with MIE courses, and for staff and students engaged in blended and online learning programme provision.
Author (Position):	Director of IT & e-Learning
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Blended and Online Learning and Quality Assurance Policy

1 Context

- 1.1 This document outlines Marino Institute of Education's (MIE) policy for delivery of programmes leading to an academic award under the [National Qualifications Framework](#) (NFQ), which is delivered, supported or assessed in an online or blended modality. This policy supports the development of flexible learning opportunities using non-traditional delivery methods, for access to higher education. This policy also informs MIE of risks posed by challenges faced in online and blended learning programmes, and ensures academic standards are maintained across all courses offered by MIE.
- 1.2 This policy covers all programmes and courses offered by MIE. It covers teaching, learning and assessment of programmes with a blended or online delivery components and is designed to safeguard the academic standards associated with MIE courses, and for staff and students engaged in blended and online learning programme provision. This policy is focused on student centred learning, teaching and assessment¹ and engagement of students in the learning process per se.
- 1.3 MIE's policy on blended and online learning provision is consistent with [Quality and Qualifications Ireland's \(QQI\) Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines \(2016\)](#) and the [Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Programmes \(2023\)](#). This policy is also informed by reports from the [National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning](#), as they have issued many comprehensive studies outlining the requirements of higher education institutions, in relation to online and blended learning provision².

2 Purpose

The objectives of this policy are:

- 2.1 To provide a framework for staff to engage with blended and online programme delivery;
- 2.2 To ensure compliance with other MIE quality assurance policies³, in relation to course delivery methodologies;
- 2.3 To ensure that MIE's learning environment has the appropriate operational supports to allow blended and online learning programme delivery;
- 2.4 To ensure that MIE's technical infrastructure can support blended and online programme delivery;

¹ See [Academic Assessment and Academic Progression Policy](#)

² <https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/publications/>

³ See [Quality Policy Statement](#), [Procedure for Quality Review of MIE Corporate and Student Support Services](#), [Quality Assurance Handbook](#) and [Quality Assurance Procedure for Review of Validated Programmes](#)

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- 2.5 To provide guidance on instructional design for blended and online programme delivery;
- 2.6 To ensure the legal responsibilities of MIE have been met, in accordance with the QQI Guidelines (2023⁴), for blended and online programme delivery.

3 Benefits

This policy supports the ongoing development of technology-enhanced learning across both online and face-to-face teaching environments that will assist in:

- 3.1 Enhancing the student experience;
- 3.2 Supporting innovative teaching strategies;
- 3.3 Building the digital capacity & competency of MIE.

4 Principles

- 4.1 This policy supports [MIE's Strategic Plan](#), the [Digital Strategy](#) (2022 to 2025) and related strategies with respect to the educational experience of MIE students and academic staff.
- 4.2 The following assumptions underpin the development and implementation of this policy:
 - 4.2.1 In accordance with [QQI Topic-Specific Guidelines for Blended and Fully Online Learning Programmes \(2023\)](#), section 4.1, MIE will ensure that the strategies and processes for the appointment, induction, training, professional development, and appraisal arrangements for academic and support staff are appropriate and specific to blended and/or fully online learning contexts.
 - 4.2.2 MIE recognises that teaching on a blended/online programme requires pedagogical and technical expertise. MIE will ensure that academic staff are supported to function effectively in their delivery of blended/online content;
 - 4.2.3 MIE recognises that benchmarks and indicators (e.g. contact hours) designed for face-to-face provision are not always fit for purpose in a blended/online learning environment and can be revised, given the “flexibility afforded by digital technologies”, as noted by Murphy (20185);
 - 4.2.4 MIE will ensure that the appropriate technical infrastructure and technical support for programmes are in place, to support blended and online modes of delivery;
 - 4.2.5 MIE will ensure its teaching, learning and assessment practices are accessible to students with disabilities⁶. As such, the principles of universal design will apply to blended and online learning provision offered by MIE;

⁴ [Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Learning Programmes, QQI, 2023](#)

- 4.2.6 MIE will ensure its teaching, learning and assessment practices are student-centred, with a focus on engaging students in the learning process through face-to-face learning or online delivery of courses;
- 4.2.7 MIE will ensure arrangements are in place for compliance with any legal, regulatory or statutory obligations required for a blended or online learning context. These include, but are not limited to:
 - a. [Child Protection Legislation](#);
 - b. [Intellectual Property and Copyright Legislation](#);
 - c. General [MIE Data Protection Regulations](#) and parameters therein;
 - d. Protections for Enrolled Learners⁷, whether enrolled by MIE or self-enrolled/registered on the institutional [Virtual Learning Environment](#) (VLE);
 - e. Local regulatory considerations in the context of wider, transnational provision, outside Irish and EU jurisdictions.

5 Definitions

The use of two key terms in this policy are defined as follows, in relation to this policy:

5.1 Definition of **Blended Learning**

The [2023 QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines](#) define blended learning to include “a type of programme where teaching, learning and assessment occur using a mix of on-site and online learning, with the online components taking place synchronously, asynchronously, or in combination”.

5.2 Definition of **Online Learning**

The [QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines, 2023](#) define online learning as “a type of programmes where ALL teaching occurs entirely online, either synchronously or asynchronously, or in combination. Importantly, learners can complete their programme of study from a distance, with no in-person or on-site requirements”.

⁵ Murphy, T. (2018) [Guide to Developing Enabling Policies for Digital Teaching and Learning in Higher Education](#)

⁶ See [Code of Practice for Students with Disabilities](#)

⁷ See [Protection of Enrolled Learners Policy](#)

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6.1 Academic Standards

- 6.1.1 MIE is responsible for the academic standards and quality assurance of programmes delivered through blended and online learning. All programmes offered under blended and online learning will be subject to the core quality processes that underpin all of MIE's programmes, as noted in our QA-related documentation⁸. It is the responsibility of MIE to manage the arrangements for the delivery of programmes and provision of support and assessment of students while ensuring that the academic standards of all awards are in accordance with MIE's academic standards as set by MIE under its academic policies⁹ and those of Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin, MIE's Designated Awarding Body.
- 6.1.2 MIE will ensure that procedures and regulations as specified in academic policies are fit for purpose in a blended and online learning environment. For example, MIE will ensure that reliable and scalable systems and processes are in place to verify the identity of students and to manage remote assessments, even across time zones. MIE will also ensure content is available in accessible formats for all.
- 6.1.3 MIE will ensure that quality assurance systems to monitor and/or moderate standards are fit-for-purpose in a blended and online learning environment.
- 6.1.4 MIE will ensure that processes and regulations in relation to [Admission, Access and Transfer Policy](#) are fit-for-purpose in a blended and online learning environment.
- 6.1.5 MIE will ensure that the [VLE](#) system supports blended and online learning programmes and the quality assurance of a flexible learning experience.

6.2 Programme Design and Delivery

- 6.2.1 In accordance with [QQI Statutory Guidelines \(2023\)](#), Section 4.2, the teaching, learning and assessment strategies and delivery mechanisms adopted in blended and online learning delivery, should be specifically designed for this study mode, the subject discipline and the intended programme learning outcomes. Accordingly, it should be apparent how the programme is informed by good online and blended learning practice in the design of these programmes. These design principles are available at the following link (staff/student login details required) on the Institutional [VLE](#) platform - <https://mie.learnonline.ie/course/view.php?id=58#section-15>

⁸ See [Quality Policy Statement](#), [Procedure for Quality Review of MIE Corporate and Student Support Services](#), [Quality Assurance Handbook](#) and [Quality Assurance Procedure for Review of Validated Programmes](#)

⁹ See [Academic Assessment and Academic Progression](#) Policy and [Admission, Access and Transfer Policy](#)

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- 6.2.2 In accordance with the QQI Statutory Guidelines (2023), MIE will ensure that blended and online learning developments are learner centred and subject-led rather than technology led. The organisational structure and processes will ensure that technology is the servant of pedagogy, and that the programmes of study delivered in a blended and online format will support study readiness, equality of opportunity and positive outcomes for learners based on learner-centred and good practice principles for these courses' provision, by MIE.
- 6.2.3 MIE will ensure its teaching, learning, and assessment practices are accessible to all students, through the implementation of a [Universal Design for Learning](#) (UDL) framework to improve and optimise teaching and learning for all. This ensures content is cognisant of “equivalency and digital first well-resourced and fit for purpose learning support and development services”. Brickfield Labs Limited and Sensus Access have been integrated into the VLE to ensure compliance with our accessibility requirements are met by all users of MIE VLE. This complies with [Section 4.3 of the QQI Statutory Guidelines, 2023](#), as amended.
- 6.2.4 In accordance with [QQI Statutory Guidelines, 2023, Section](#) subject specific and educational scholarship informs the pedagogy and instructional design. MIE recognises that contact hours may no longer be an appropriate indicator related to teaching. The programme design will specify the required effort for the activities of teaching, content creation and moderation in blended and online learning delivery.
- 6.2.5 MIE will take all practicable steps to ensure security and reliability of its online learning and support systems in accordance with [MIE's IT Security Policy](#).
- 6.2.6 MIE will control access to its online learning and support systems.
- 6.2.7 MIE will take all practicable steps to ensure continuity of service delivery of its online learning and support systems as outlined in its service level agreement with the institutional [VLE](#) supplier. It will ensure that a contingency plan is available in the event of failure of the designated modes of delivery.

6.3 Student Information/Support

- 6.3.1 Prior to enrolment on a blended and/or online learning programme, students are provided with an induction to the programme. This should include but not be limited to – the nature and extent of autonomous learning, collaborative and supported aspects of learning, details of specified timings for synchronous learning or assessment, rules governing flexibility for learners, and regulations in place to provide a unique student identity and protect student information.
- 6.3.2 The student induction will also specify requirements for access to the online learning environment – detailing the required broadband specification and any specific hardware or software requirements, for example.
- 6.3.3 The student induction will provide information on the level and nature of support available, including but not limited to academic, technical and pastoral support.
- 6.3.4 MIE will ensure that procedures and regulations as specified in the [MIE Staff &](#)

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[Students Code of Conduct for Use of IT Systems](#) are fit for purpose in a blended and/or online learning environment.

- 6.3.5 MIE will ensure that guidelines as specified in [MIE's Policy on Social Media and Social Networking](#) are fit for purpose in a blended and online learning environment.
- 6.3.6 MIE also provides support to students on all aspects of face-to-face and online delivery through an [IT Support Helpdesk](#), a dedicated Support page (IT Support for Students, TELMiE about IT for Staff) on the Institutional [VLE](#) and through face to face support sessions held throughout the academic year.

6.4 Assessment of Students and Requirements

- 6.4.1 Assessments for blended and online learning programmes will be similar to those used for on-campus delivery with parity of standards being paramount. MIE will ensure that the outcomes of assessment for a blended and/or online learning programme meet the specified academic level of the award as defined by the QQI.
- 6.4.2 Information on methods and criteria of assessment will be provided in the programme handbooks. In programmes featuring online assessment, the students will receive orientation sessions in advance to ensure that students feel supported in engaging in this type of programme delivery and assessment.
- 6.4.3 Students will be made aware of MIE's [Procedure for Preventing and Responding to Cases of Suspected Plagiarism](#), which is provided in the regulations issued to all students and in the programme handbooks.
- 6.4.4 Security issues relating to the authentication of a student's work will be considered when designing assessment processes.

6.5 Staff Professional Development in Online Teaching and Learning

- 6.5.1 Educators need a set of digital competences specific to their profession in order to be able to seize the potential of digital technologies for enhancing and innovating education.
- 6.5.2 MIE will ensure that staff involved in teaching on a blended and/or online learning programme are appropriately qualified and supported.
- 6.5.3 MIE will ensure staff are provided with opportunities to develop their academic and technology-enhanced learning skills and digital competences¹⁰ in line with the [MIE Digital & Strategic Plans \(2020 to 2025\)](#)

6 Responsibility

The Director of IT & e-Learning, with support from Heads of Department, is responsible for the implementation of this Blended and Online Learning and Quality Assurance policy.

7 Related Documents

- 8.1 [MIE Policy Bring Your Own Device](#)
- 8.2 [Virtual Learning Environment Policy](#)
- 8.3 [MIE Policy on Social Media and Social Networking](#)
- 8.4 [MIE IT Acceptable Use Policy](#)
- 8.5 [MIE IT Security Policy](#)
- 8.6 [MIE Website\(s\) Terms of Use](#)
- 8.7 [MIE Website Cookies Policy](#)
- 8.8 [MIE IT Services General Terms and Conditions](#)
- 8.9 [MIE Staff & Students Code of Conduct for Use of IT Systems](#)
- 8.10 [MIE Privacy Policy](#)

¹⁰ See [MIE Staff & Students Code of Conduct for Use of IT Systems](#)