

2 **CONTEXT**

Innovation in educational technology has expanded options for flexible learning experiences. For example, online learning, mobile and digital technologies, social media, and MOOCs are harnessed to a greater or lesser extent by providers to offer a more flexible approach towards the delivery of learning. Such learning may or may not be credit bearing or certified. These guidelines are neutral on the technology and face-to-face methodology used to support the remote interaction. Innovation will continue and new flexible and distributed models of learning will evolve. The focus, therefore, of the guidance provided here is on the quality assurance of provision and related services in the context of blended learning.

Blended learning will **always** involve face-to-face learning. Providers engaged in blended learning will typically also deliver the face-to-face component. As with all types of learning/delivery, providers will look for the most effective and efficient means to support learners in achieving intended learning outcomes. Often this will require a blend of different learning and teaching strategies. It is commonplace that a programme described as blended learning will include a combination of, for example:

1. Online learning resources developed for online delivery
2. Access to learning technologies such as virtual learning environment
3. Tools to support virtual learning and off campus learning– virtual learning spaces and discussion and other forums to support students
4. Online activities to support formative and summative assessment
5. Face-to-face tuition
6. Assessment submitted, marked and returned to learners with feedback through electronic or other media

Benchmarks and indicators designed for face-to-face provision are not always fit-for-purpose in an online learning context and need to be revised as appropriate. For example, indicators related to teaching (contact time), accommodation (classrooms) or physical library facilities and buildings may not be appropriate in making judgements about aspects of online learning and provision.

Within institutions, blended learning options may be offered in all or some programmes, to small or large numbers of learners; and may form a substantive or small proportion of the learner's overall experience. Increasingly, providers offer learners some part of their face-to-face programmes as blended learning. The virtual learning environment (VLE) is typically the most popular platform used to offer a blended learning experience. The intention is that the good practice principles underlying this document will provide a reference point to inform practice across this spectrum.