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				3/5/21

GENERAL INFORMATION

1	Document category	Policy Guidelines and Standards		
2	Document approver	Principal & CEO		
3	Minimum list of document users to be notified upon release of document update	All Management and Academic Staff		
4	Document change history			
	D	Document Change Tracking Number	Date released	Change originator
		036/2021	09/04/2021	Andrew Luke Vella, Albert Agius
	Change history (Section/change details)			
	Fixed Document numbering Renumbered sections 2.2 and 2.3 (switched order)			
	Document change history			
	E	Document Change Tracking Number	Date released	Change originator
		042/21	3/5/21	Dalmas Pierre, as approved by Col
	Change history (Section/change details)			
	Included a provision that the pre and post-assessment allowed by lecturers for online TCA's, quizzes etc. is of a maximum of 15 mins respectively. Included need that students ensure that the timestamp of the saved material does not exceed the set TCA assessment period unless connectivity issues have been experienced and communicated to the Lecturer and Institute Management. Included Table 1 and Table 2 under paragraph 2.3.1 to provide an example of the 15 min pre and post assessment time period. The recommendation that the Lecturer includes in the front sheet both the exam time period and the pre/post assessment contingency time period.			

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4. Malta Further and Higher Education Authority Standards and Guidelines**APPENDIX 1:** Glossary of terms as defined by the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority**1. INTRODUCTION**

MCAST is embarking on a longer-term EdTech initiative (see <https://www.mcast.edu.mt/wp-content/uploads/MCAST-EdTech-Operational-Framework.pdf>) for the gradual introduction of a full blended learning methodology across all MCAST programmes.

The basic concept is for MCAST programmes to rest fully within a virtual learning environment (VLE) and for the teaching and skilling component of each programme to be carried out in a pre-designed merge of physical interventions and learning online, supported by virtual & augmented reality. This will tackle more than just knowledge transfer, also going into the skills and competences that vocational students require.

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

Furthermore, this document is being implemented within the framework of the MCAST Regulations, Policies and Procedures and the Collective Agreement for Academic staff already in place.

2. EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS FOR ONLINE QUALITY TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT**2.1 General standards for e-learning**

- a) Online learning can take place synchronously or asynchronously under the supervision of the assigned academic/s. In asynchronous learning, the engagement between students



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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 are required to avail themselves of the MCAST intranet maintenance request portal for logging their request for IT support http://eportal.mcast.edu.mt/Main/Pages/Maintenance_Request.aspx
- d) Academics shall be entitled to Continuous Professional Development on 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 MCAST rules and regulations (Doc 038 'Student Conduct and Regulations') and the Laws of Malta.
- g) Academics are expected to enforce acceptable behaviour from their students in e-learning and to report to the relevant authorities within MCAST any such failure from students (Doc 188 'College Academic and Student Board Procedures').
- h) Online attendance by students is obligatory and shall be recorded.
- i) 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 prior to or within the lecture that follows. 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.
- j) Time constrained assessments: refer to section 2.2.
- k) In general, students are 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 itself 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 camera, and care must be taken by the Lecturer on what questions are asked so that no personal information is recorded.
- l) The Lecturer may, at any time during an online lecture, take steps to verify the actual presence of participants registered for the online lecture



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2.2 QA Compliance Standards for delivery of full or partially online (blended) courses

Courses/ lessons with a strong blend of e-learning or 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 how to access all elements of the online learning environment.
- b. Role – the academic gives clear information about his professional role in the learning environment and the role of the learners.
- c. Description – a course description including pre-requisites (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 competences – the learners are made aware of the technical competences needed to successfully reach the learning outcomes.
- g. Ownership – the academic gives learners the opportunity 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 are aware of what is expected of them when they are assessed.
- b) Strategies – internally verified, clear, well-defined and measurable assessment of learning outcomes suited to the level of the learners.
- c) Grading – grades are given fairly and transparently through appropriate assessment instruments sanctioned by the institution.
- d) Feedback – both academic and learners are given the opportunity to provide feedback related to grading.



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- 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 academic and learners that build a community that supports teaching and learning:*

- a) Fostering – the academic welcomes learners and gives them the opportunity to communicate and create an online environment that fosters peer learning and engagement.
- b) Management – community building is supported by clear instructions, rules and regulations. While the academic facilitates engagement, learners are invested with the 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 competences 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 the learners are given enough time 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 are going to 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 are varied in terms of the multimedia content and multi-modal delivery channels to cater to the different learning preferences of learners.
- e) Openness – the academic should give learners the opportunity to suggest their own resources for adoption in the course.
- f) Academic integrity – the academic promotes best practice in the use of 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 Inclusive Education Unity and the Learning Support Unit to obtain such services



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as mentoring, advice and other skills that support them in achieving 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 Vocational Coordinators, academic staff or Institute management.

2.2.7 Course evaluation – feedback to improve teaching and learning:

- a) Entitlement – The College should give learners the opportunity to provide feedback on the whole learning experience. On the other hand, academics should also be able to provide their 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 closure of the course via Classter (and/or Moodle). The final grades should be provided within a reasonable timeframe after the closure of the course.
- b) Resolution – all pending issues between the academic and the learners are resolved.
- c) Archiving – the academic makes sure the course/learning area resources, texts, communication, etc., are backed up or archived (in line with the institution's access policies) in a safe and secure way.

2.2.9 Instructional design cycle:

- a. Academic review – the academic, the Institute Management and Curriculum Department review the course structure and content, the experience gathered, and the feedback provided by the students.
- b. Technical review – the academic, 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.



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2.3 General standards for online Time Constrained Assessment (TCA)

2.3.1 Preamble

It is the College policy that Time Constrained Assessments (TCAs) are as much as possible conducted on Campus.

When setting up online TCAs, the Lecturer shall include an additional 'Connectivity Contingency Time Period' at the start and also at the 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 maximum duration of 15 mins prior to the start of the 'assessment time period (duration)' to allow for students to connect online and download the assessment brief and;
- a maximum duration of 15 mins at the end of the 'assessment time period (duration)' to allow the students to upload the assessment material and complete Moodle 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 the front-sheet as per the assessment strategy	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.
<p>08:45 hrs: Lecturer sets a time window to open and provides student access to the assessment brief/quiz material.</p> <p>Student to connect and access/download the material required for the TCA.</p>	<p>09:00 hrs: Student to commence work on assessment.</p> <p>10:00 hrs: Student to stop working on TCA, save work and start the upload process. Timestamp of saved documents by student cannot exceed 10:00 hrs (Refer also to paragraph 2.3.2).</p>	<p>10:00hrs - 10:15 hrs: Student need to complete the upload process by 10:15hrs</p> <p>10:15hrs: End of the window for student upload of material</p>

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



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

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

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

Students are expected to start working on their assignment at the start of 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 their Institute Management for further instructions and inform their lecturers accordingly. It is strongly advisable that students retain, where possible, screenshots as evidence.

In these cases, the Institute Management 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 the Institute Management the opportunity to report to his/her Institute and attempt the same TCA on the same day.

2.3.3 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 on the assignment front sheet). 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).

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

Students who experience problems uploading the assessment material are required to immediately contact their Institute Management and inform the Lecturer for further instructions. The Institute Management will direct the student accordingly.



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

It is strongly advisable that students retain screenshots as evidence when experiencing connectivity problems.

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

Speed test by Ookla (or similar): <https://www.speedtest.net/>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QdxgVy0PNAE>

3. 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 aims and objectives of the academic 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 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 over 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 is simple enough to be conducive to teaching and learning without the need to possess advanced ICT skills and competences.
- g) Investment – the technical requirements of the instructional resources and the virtual learning environment/learning space do not require learners to make any significant



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new investment in hardware, software and online services to be able 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 governs the use of the technological infrastructure supporting e-learning are accessible via the MCAST Website / Intranet site.

3.1.2 MCAST shall provide adequate ICT and Internet infrastructure on Campus

3.2 The official MCAST tools: Moodle VLE, Office 365 and Classter

- Moodle VLE, Office 365 and Classter are the official tools to deliver e-learning at MCAST from an educational and administrative aspect for all staff and students registered at MCAST. MCAST shall provide an @mcast.edu.mt email address to all registered full-time and part-time students.
- MCAST shall provide adequate educational, technical and administrative support for the use of this and other hardware, software and services sanctioned by MCAST.
- Academics are welcome to use their own hardware, software and services to attain the learning objectives and outcomes of the courses they deliver. However, MCAST cannot guarantee full academic, technical and administrative support on systems that are not officially in use.

4. MALTA FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY (MFHEA)

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

In case of conflict, the interpretation of MFHEA standards in relation to e-learning shall overrule the interpretation of this document. These IQA standards are available here: <https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/services/Documents/QA%20and%20ACC%20Communications/Annex%201%20-%20NQAF%20Standards%20with%20amendments%20to%20cover%20online%20and%20blended%20learning.pdf>

In terms of blended and e-learning, MFHEA has published the following glossary of terms. MCAST is adopting these terms and their definition as replicated in Appendix 1 : Glossary of Terms.

Reference Documents

- Doc 035 : Student Grievance Policy and Procedure
- Doc 038: Student Conduct Regulations
- Doc 044 : Psycho-Social Support Services Policy
- Doc 086 : Internal Verification Procedure
- Doc 055 : Career Guidance Policy
- Doc 188: College Academic and Student Board Procedures
- Doc 248 : LSU Provision of Additional Support Services
- Doc 250 : Provision of IEU Support Services



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APPENDIX 1: GLOSSARY OF TERMS (AS DEFINED BY THE MALTA FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY)

Asynchronous Learning	The learning that occurs when the educator and the learners are not communicating and engaging in real-time - More commonly known as self-study.
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 in part 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 on the basis of the related pedagogical principles and the programme's needs but both modes are complementary in the programme.
Computer-based Learning	Learning where computing devices constitute the main tool for the transfer of knowledge, skills and competences; 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. Communication between the educator and the learner occurs via telecommunication or such services like mail. In the 21st century the term has been replaced by e-learning as almost all distance learning is being 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 where the educator and the learning are in the same physical space and thus face each other during interaction. This is the traditional mode of learning where educators and learners need to agree on a fixed time and place to engage in teaching and learning.
Mobile Learning	Teaching and learning that is 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 is made possible with technology that eliminates the barriers of physical space.



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Web-enhanced Learning	Teaching and learning that makes use of 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 provides 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 include competence that are 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. In this framework, the term "digital technologies" is used as the most general concept, comprising computer networks, hardware, software and content.				
Digital Skills	The ability to handle, operate, set up and/or programme digital devices.				
Digital Tools	Digital technologies used for a given purpose or for carrying out a particular function of e.g. information processing, communication, content creation, safety or problem solving.				
e-Portfolio	Collections of (students') work that 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 programmes in the equipment).				
Learning Analytics	Learning analytics is the measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of data about learners and their contexts, for the purposes of understanding and optimising learning and the environments in which it occurs.				
Learning Management System	A software application for web-based technology used to plan, implement and assess a learning process, allowing a teacher to create and deliver content, monitor student participation, and assess student performance. Also referred to as Virtua Learning Environment.				
Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)	A free, web-based distance learning programme aimed at enrolling many people from around the world.				
Open Educational Resources	Teaching and educational resources that are openly licensed and available free of charge.				



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Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)	A software application or web-based technology used to plan, implement and assess a learning process, allowing a teacher to create and deliver content, monitor student participation, and assess student performance. Also referred to as Learning Management System (LMS).				

