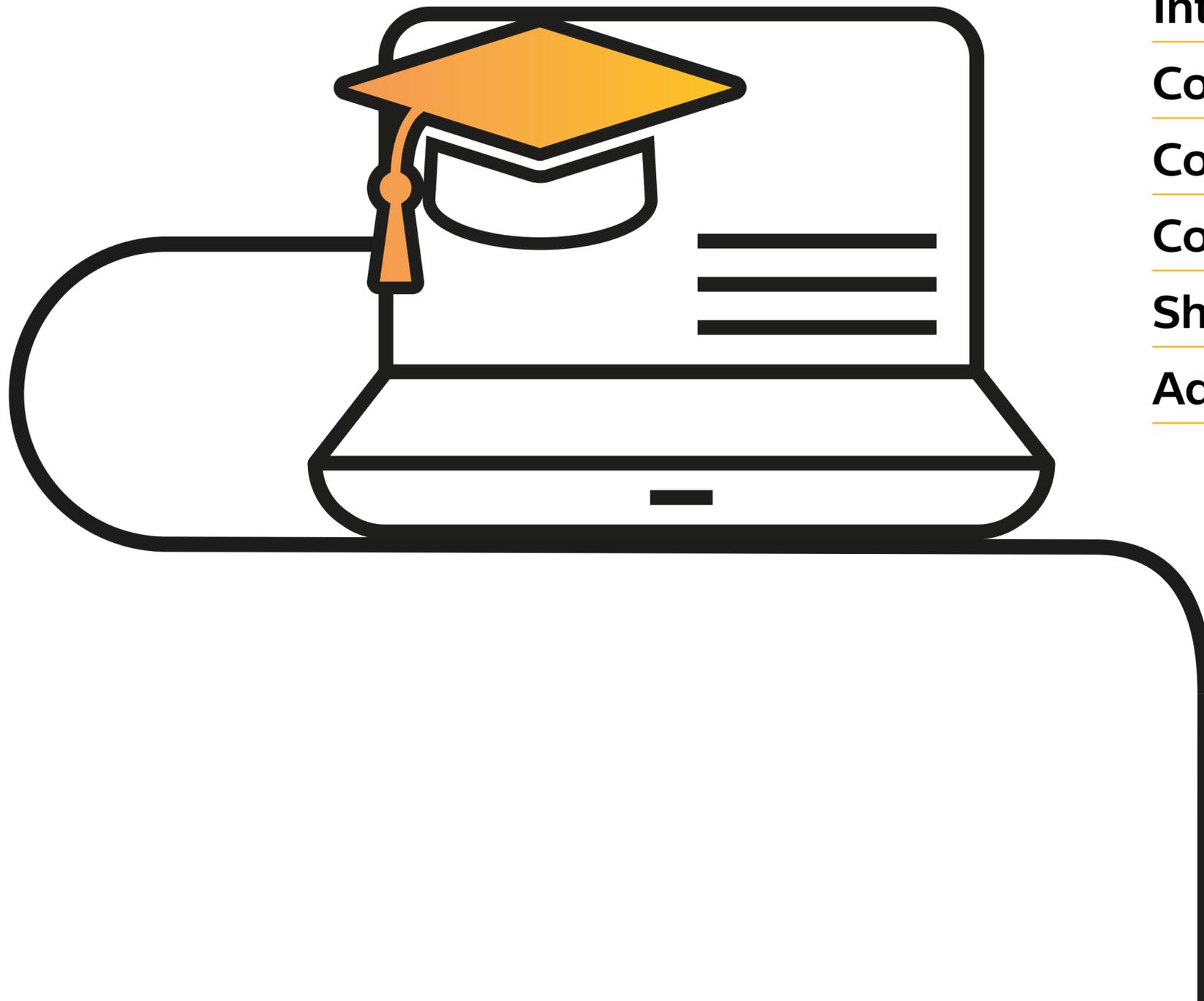


Hallmarks of Success



Course Design, Approval and Management

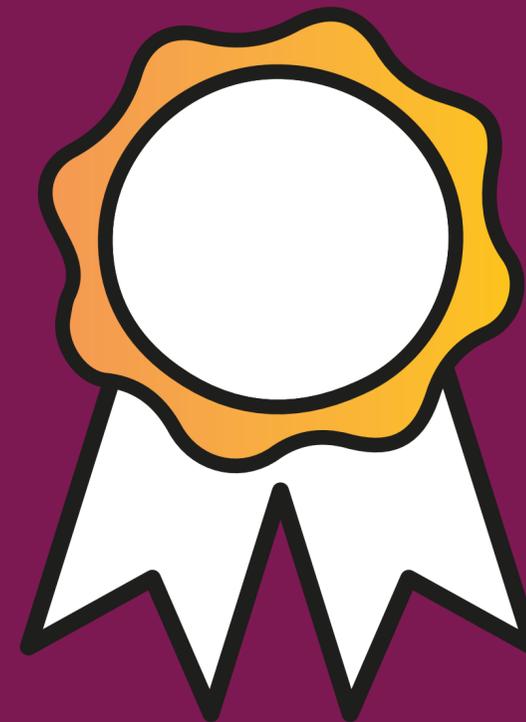


Introduction	1
Course design	6
Course approval	13
Course management	21
Shared understanding of key terms	30
Additional resources	31

Contents

Introducing Hallmarks of Success

The Hallmarks of Success series is a collection of four playbooks that have been devised to help higher education providers consider and implement the key factors that underpin success in a hybrid learning environment.



The playbooks were informed by, and build on, Questions to Inform a Toolkit for Enhancing Quality in a Digital Environment. This playbook is aimed primarily at those involved with course design, approval and management including quality professionals, those with a strategic remit for learning and teaching, course leaders and academic staff.

It may also be of interest to learning technologists and professional services staff involved in the creation and design of course provision.

Their adaptable nature means they can be used as a meaningful exercise to stimulate discussion between course teams so that providers can add success factors or consider additional potential roadblocks that are pertinent to their own institutional settings.



There are four playbooks in this series:

Hallmarks of Success Playbook Series

1. [Student-Centred Learning and Teaching \(Oct 21\)](#)
2. [Assessment in Digital and Blended Pedagogy \(Feb 22\)](#)
3. [Course Design, Approval and Management \(Apr 22\)](#)
4. [Supporting and Empowering Teaching Staff \(Jul 22\)](#)

We hope that the structure of the playbooks helps to stimulate discussion and enables providers to consider the most effective routes to success in hybrid learning environments developed in their own specific contexts.

Each playbook is structured using:



Course Design, Approval and Management

Course design, approval and management are critical elements in ensuring the quality of the student learning experience and can facilitate creativity, innovation and a culture of continuous improvement.

Typically, blended and digital approaches require extensive planning and preparation, and involve a wider range of stakeholders than more traditional delivery. Success in digital and blended environments is therefore heavily reliant on well-informed and considered course design, approval and management.

This playbook can help higher education providers consider what success in course design, approval and management looks like in blended and digital environments within their institution.



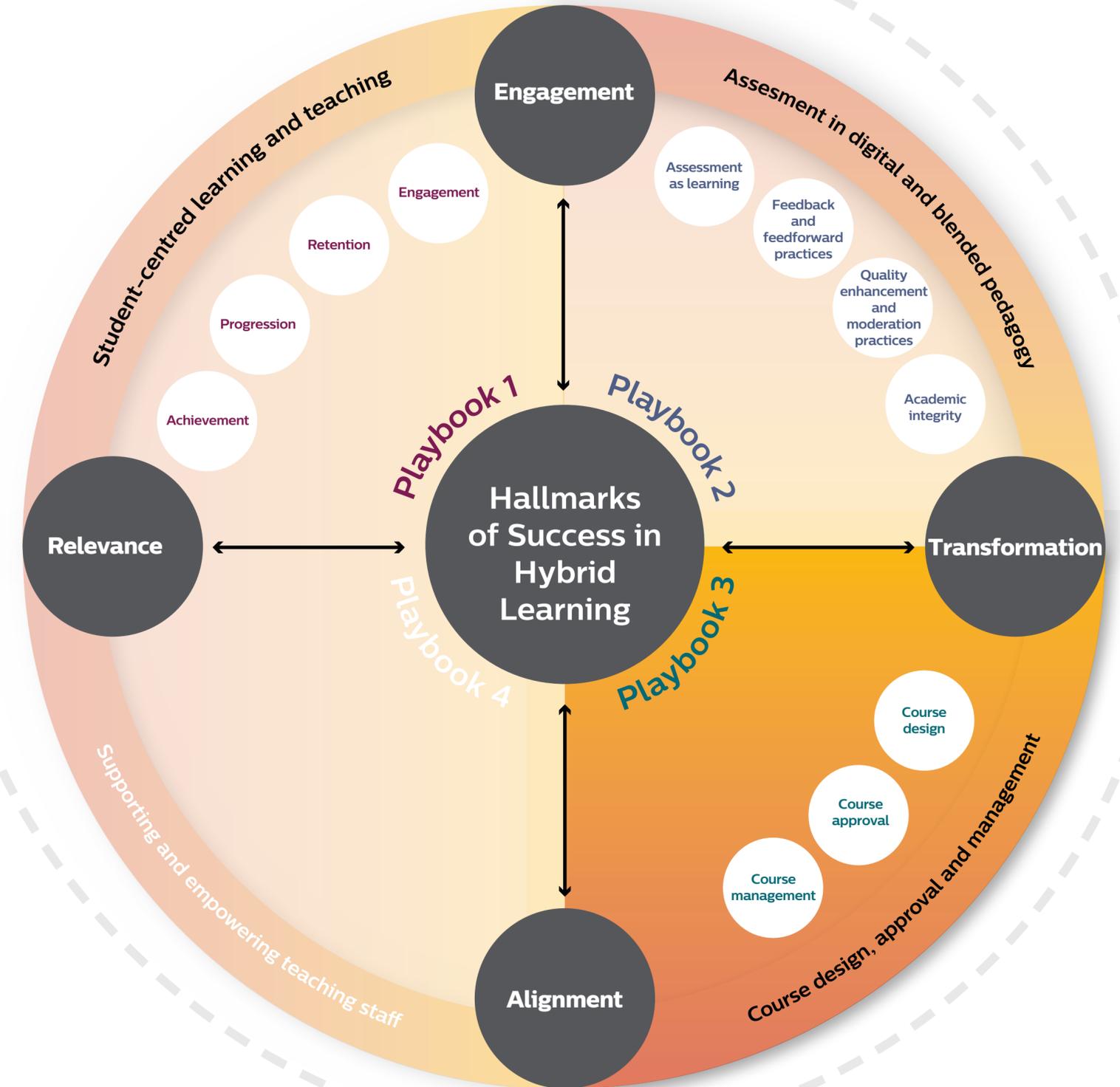
The Hallmarks of Success Playbook: Course Design, Approval and Management is presented in three sections and considers pertinent issues related to each of these areas:

- Course design
- Course approval
- Course management

The statements in this playbook can be used to:

- reflect on existing arrangements for course design, approval and management in blended and digital environments
- help design approval and management processes that ensure the success of digital and blended approaches
- inform course team discussions around new digital and blended provision
- reflect on whether arrangements for design, approval and management are accessible and inclusive
- consider the extent to which design, approval and management processes embed opportunities for continuous improvement
- review strategic approaches to course design, approval and management within a digital environment.

We have defined a number of key terms to promote shared understanding of terminology. You can find this in a table towards the end of the playbook on [page 30](#).



Course design facilitates high-quality digital and blended teaching, learning and assessment that is underpinned by appropriate pedagogical approaches and fully accessible to all.

Course design





Success statement

Design is based on appropriate pedagogy and driven by learning outcomes.



Conditions for achieving success

Provision is underpinned by pedagogic principles, making appropriate use of digital and blended delivery.

There is a strong pedagogic rationale for whether sessions will be synchronous or asynchronous, and how both forms of activity interact to enhance learning.



Potential roadblocks

Design choices are premised upon the latest technological innovation but do not fully consider learning outcomes.

Course design is based on convenience or perceived marketability rather than educational value.

Techniques and tools are deployed in an ad hoc manner, not considering how they align to learning outcomes.



Overcoming roadblocks

Ensure course creation teams have sufficient expertise in discipline- relevant pedagogies.

Provide course design training events for staff that impresses the importance, and supports the creation, of course designs underpinned by pedagogic principle.

Create physical and virtual spaces for course design teams to develop a clear pedagogic rationale for the course and consider how digital tools may help facilitate teaching, learning and assessment.



Course creation is a collaborative, creative process harnessing appropriate expertise.

Course teams work in partnership with a range of internal and external stakeholders, representing technical, educational, industry and subject expertise.

Resistance to wider stakeholder involvement from course teams.

Emphasise the value and power of co-created learning experiences, especially in the digital world.

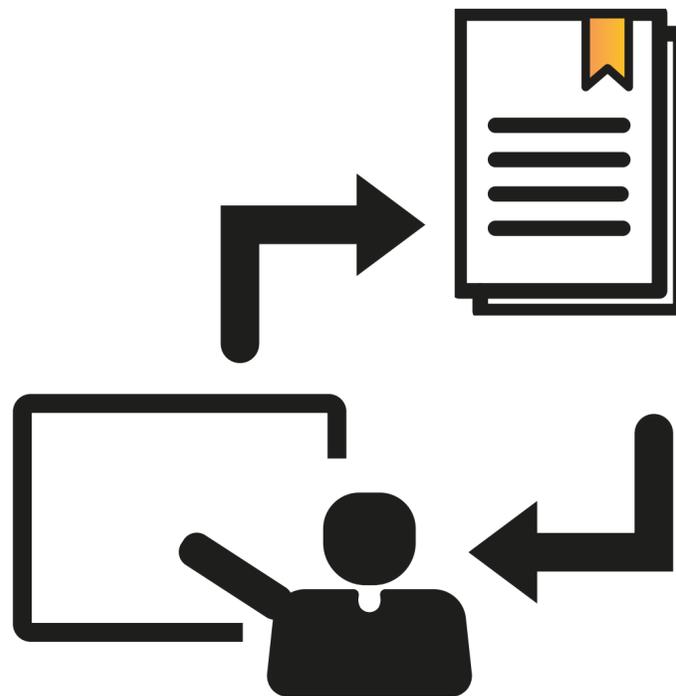
Low engagement from stakeholders.

Provide support and training opportunities for participation and offer a link person as a single point of contact.

Identify and share examples of good practice from other parts of the provider.

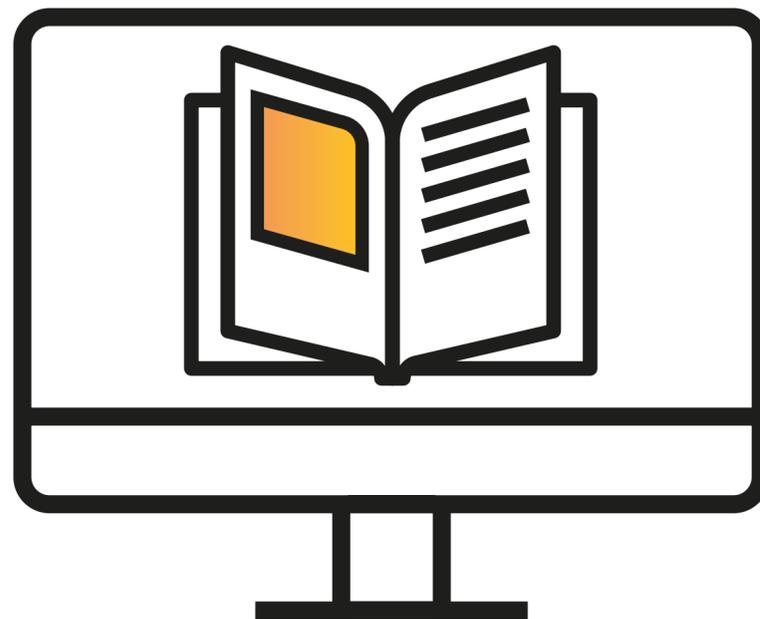
Time and availability constraints.

Be flexible with creation 'spaces' - considering if everyone needs to be physically present. Use technology to enable and facilitate course design discussions.





Learners, and the learner experience, are central to the design of digital and blended provision.



Learners are consulted at every stage of course design.

Learners are valued as co-creators of teaching, learning and assessment activity.

The ability of learners to easily access technologies is fully considered throughout the design process.

Learners are consulted at every stage of course design.

Conditions for achieving success



Potential roadblocks

Resistance to learner involvement from staff members.

Low engagement from learners.

Failure to recognise differential abilities of learners to engage with course technologies or potential issues of digital poverty.

Resistance to learner involvement from staff members.



Overcoming roadblocks

Emphasise the value and power of co-created learning experiences, especially in the digital world.

Consider what may be causing low engagement and whether this is linked to accessibility or clarity.

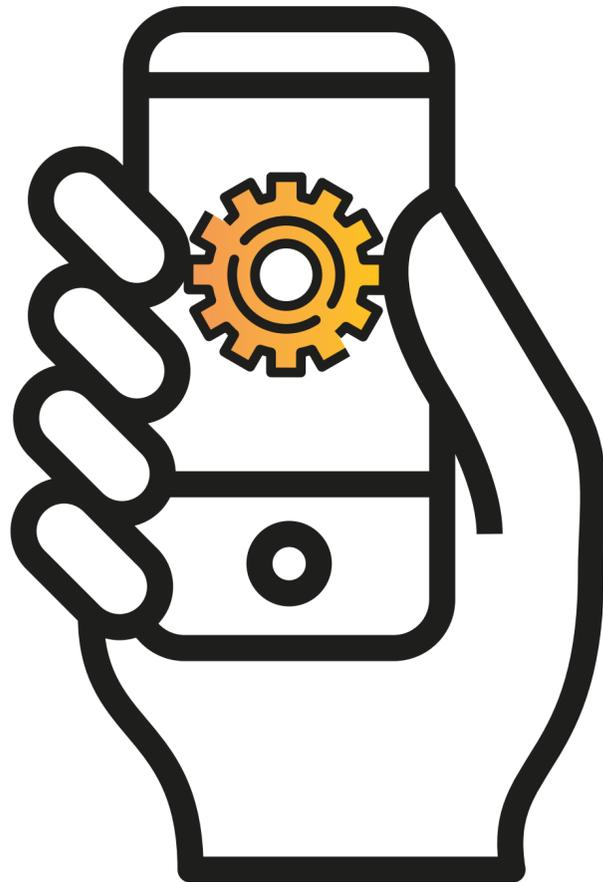
Understand the digital capabilities of learners and provide opportunities for training and development.

Consider how learners can fully engage with all course technologies taking into account bandwidth requirements if students are intended to access particular technology and/or resources off campus. Consider scheduling activities so they can be undertaken on campus.

Provide learners with appropriate and accessible resources, wherever they are required to enable full participation.



Course design and development are embedded iterative processes in digital and blended approaches.



There are regular and embedded opportunities for reflection and review of all course activities.

Course design and development provide opportunities to reflect upon digital capacity and capability at every level: institutional, course, and learner.

New developments and technologies are reviewed and piloted.

Little engagement with, or enthusiasm for, reflection.

Mismatches between the 'pace' of course development and digital capacity and capability, which may lead to deficiencies in delivery and poor learner experiences.

New developments are not reviewed, leading to courses becoming dated. New technology is not piloted, leading to poor implementation.

Incentivise and encourage reflective practice as a basis for sustainable course modification and development.

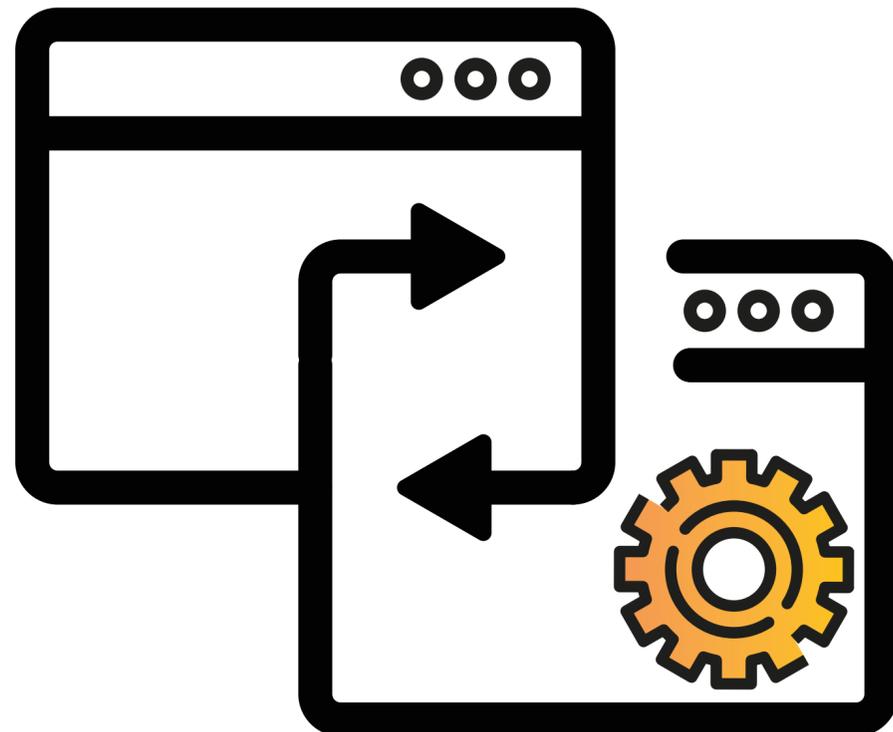
Ensure that course reviews and reflective windows are safe, supported spaces for teams to develop rather than performance management mechanisms.

Ensure there are clear processes for course review and testing of new technology, and staff have time to engage with them.

Share good practice from across the provider, enabling teams to share information about the value of different technologies and effective methods of piloting.

 Success statement	 Conditions for achieving success	 Potential roadblocks	 Overcoming roadblocks
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Teaching, learning and assessment activity is coherent, credible and reinforces digital literacy.



Learning outcomes encompass and clearly articulate digital skills; all teaching, learning and assessment align with these learning outcomes.

Poor learner reception to, and engagement with, digital elements of teaching, learning and assessment.

First appreciate the digital comfort zone of learners, then progressively scaffold digital development through all learning activities to promote confidence.

There is seamless transition between digital and face-to-face elements of the course.

Failure to consider the impact of moving between digital and face-to-face elements of the course on learners.

Map the sequencing of synchronous and asynchronous activities, how they support each other and scaffold learning.

Provide opportunities for design teams to see how these transitions are effectively managed in other courses.

There is a clear assessment strategy and assessments are appropriately situated to support learning.

New developments are not reviewed, leading to courses becoming dated. New technology is not piloted, leading to poor implementation.

Produce a course assessment strategy that details when and how learners will be informed about assessment timings.

Course teams do not communicate about assessment timings.

Consider how assessments map across the course, not just at module level, to discourage bunching of assessment/uneven assessment loading.

Calendar convenience is the principal driver of assessment points.

At every assessment point, there are opportunities to develop digital skills.

Assessment design does not fully consider learning outcomes and digital skill development.

Establish an assessment working group, including learner, employer and learning support voices. Task them with review of assessment strategy and the production of an assessment calendar before every course delivery.

Provide development opportunities (synchronous and asynchronous) for staff to acquire expertise in different approaches to learning, teaching and assessment in a digital environment.



Inclusion and accessibility are fully considered and incorporated in course design.



Every course activity promotes equality of opportunity among learners and proactively reduces barriers to participation.

Failure to appreciate/address potential barriers to participation.

Include diverse voices on course creation teams, particularly those often underrepresented, and ensure their views are heard.

Embed opportunities for skills development around inclusivity within learning activities. Ensure those responsible for course design and delivery have access to training such as 'recognising unconscious bias'. Signpost them to resources such as [Creating Inclusive Subject Communities](#).

Learning environments are inclusive and safe spaces that value, and work with, the lived experiences of all participants

Uncertainty about the most effective ways of ensuring equality while maintaining standards.

Consult with strategic leads/champions of diversity within the institution while designing the course.

Course content is rich, linking with local and global contexts. It embraces a variety of perspectives and voices.

Reticence to reduce reliance on traditional/familiar resources and embrace new materials/approaches.

Ensure course teams can identify and explain how diverse voices are reflected in the curriculum and materials.

Create a vibrant culture of staff development, with opportunities to engage with a range of local and global contemporary disciplinary approaches.

Course approval systems ensure that blended and digital courses are high-quality leading to valued qualifications, with explicit positive learning outcomes.

Course approval





Course development takes place within a coherent, consistent approach to digital and blended provision across the portfolio.



There is a clear alignment between proposed courses and relevant provider strategies, including blended and digital learning.

Disciplinary teams work in isolation.

Provide institutional-level course design support to ensure strategy is meaningfully contextualised within individual courses and the student experience.



Blended and digital delivery is considered solely from subject perspectives.

Include a requirement for design teams to consider and explain how courses interface with the provider's overarching blended/digital strategy and learning, teaching and assessment strategies.



Approval requirements for blended and digital provision are clearly articulated.

A lack of clarity regarding provider expectations of digital provision.

Consider including 'sign-off' mechanisms where course teams need to demonstrate consultation with blended and digital strategic leads, and how advice and guidance has been accommodated.





Approval arrangements consider issues appropriate in blended and online environments.



Clear mechanisms are in place to ensure the currency of learning resources and delivery methods.

The currency of learning resources and/or delivery mechanisms are not considered or only considered at inception, leading to them becoming dated and with limited future application.

Ensure courses include monitoring processes directed at currency of resources and methods.

Scrutiny includes appropriate expertise to review digital and blended approaches.

Lack of technical knowledge and digital expertise at course approval events.

Ensure the composition of approval panels includes expertise regarding blended and digital approaches.

Difficulty in securing appropriate expertise for approval panels.

Include a wide range of stakeholders in approval panels - including technical and industry experts.

Course teams provide practical demonstration of core technologies as part of the approval process.

Insufficient time to demonstrate technology.

Ensure time is allocated for demonstrations, and course designers are aware of these requirements in advance.

Technologies not available pre-approval.

Allow for specific consideration of the adequacy and availability of digital resources at initial consideration of portfolio additions.



Courses lead to credible and explicit positive learning outcomes for learners and promote the development of digital agency.

There is a planned approach to the development of learners' digital competencies throughout the course.

Digital development is insufficiently embedded or integrated within course.

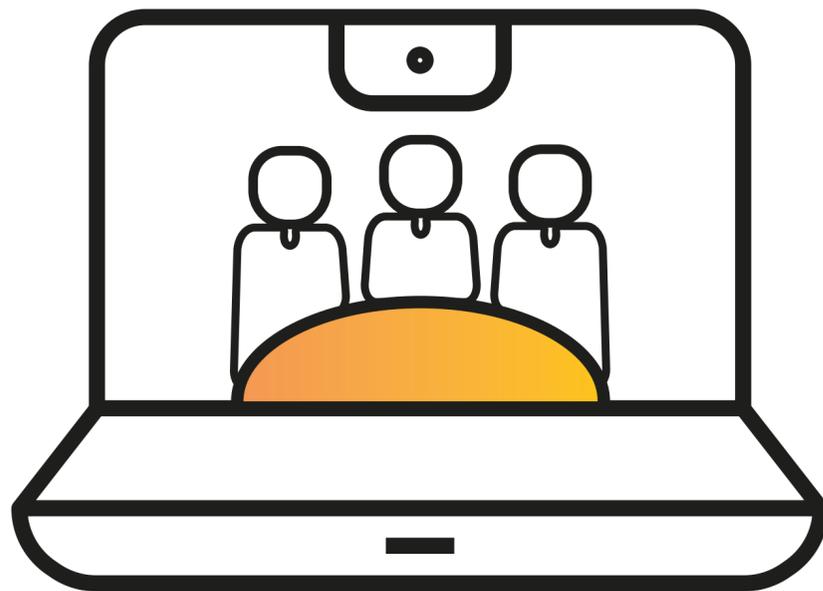
Ensure courses progressively scaffold digital development for learners.

Provide staff with opportunities to practice developing digital learning outcomes, and offer training where required.

Digital skill development is clearly linked to 'real-world' competencies.

The wider application and transferability of digital and online learning, and skills development, is not made clear for staff or students.

Harness external and employer expertise. Some providers use 'industry advisory boards' to reflect on 'real-world relevance'.



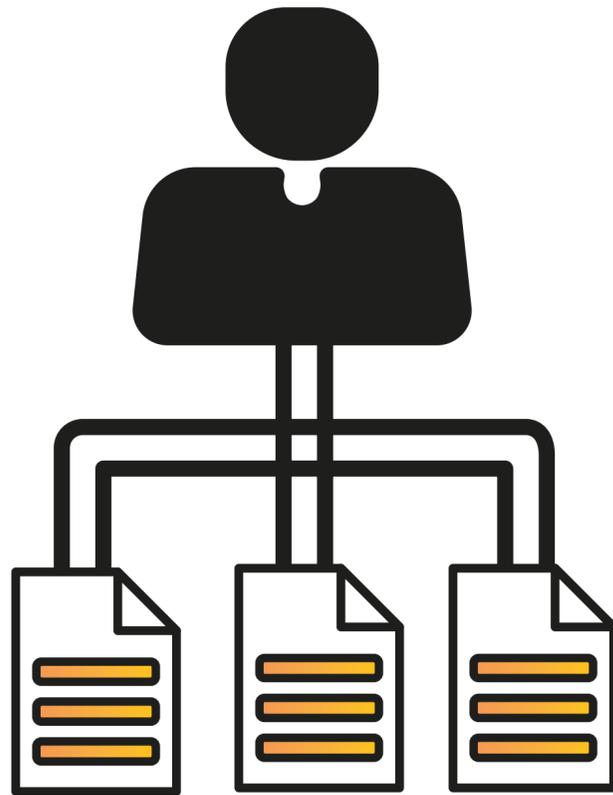


Course development is driven by clear pedagogical principles.

Pedagogical approaches are explicit for all approved courses.

Over-emphasis on market demand, or novel approaches, without considering wider educational value

Ensure approval systems and business planning mechanisms require course teams to make pedagogy explicit





Courses are developed and delivered by appropriately qualified and skilled staff. Course teams clearly include both academic and professional services staff.



Teaching staff not only have subject expertise, but a sound knowledge of pedagogical approaches.

Academic subject experts and learning technologists/online learning designers work in tandem to create transformative learning opportunities.

Lack of digital competence and literacy gaps in disciplinary areas.

Lack of awareness of learning technology and/or support available to design online learning.

Map staff digital capabilities and provide opportunities for development as appropriate.

Ensure business planning and course approval mechanisms fully consider the need for additional staff and digital resources if required.

Provide opportunities and enable collaborative activity between academic and technical staff.

Use co-delivery with technical teams where beneficial for learning.



Success statement

Courses are adequately resourced.



Conditions for achieving success

There is robust consideration of the infrastructure and resource available, or required, to support the course.



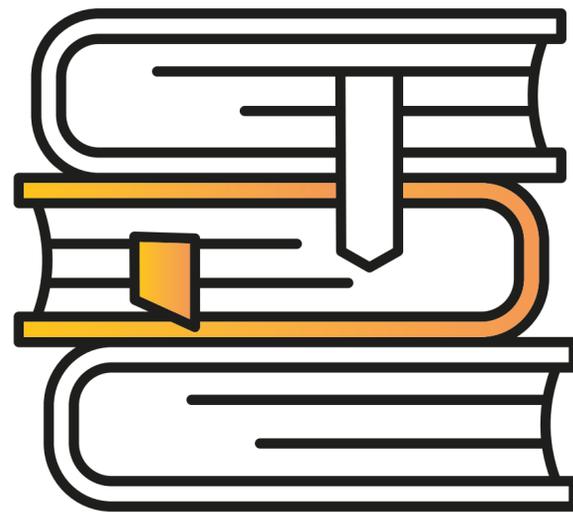
Potential roadblocks

Resources are considered only at course inception leading to an inability to flex and adapt, and to appropriately develop the course in response to changing need.



Overcoming roadblocks

Ensure systems are in place to regularly review resource provision.





Courses promote equality and accessibility for all learners.

There is a robust consideration of the ways in which courses not only remove barriers to participation, but also actively promote inclusion.

Adoption of new technologies and methods of delivery create potential barriers to participation.

Create explicit opportunities for course teams to include equality impact assessments in approval documentation.

Courses proactively work to reduce issues of differential access to technology and digital poverty.

Failure to consider the impact of blended and digital approaches on all groups of learners.

Ask course teams to consult with representatives from diverse communities as part of the course design process to identify any potential barriers that may prevent learners from accessing or engaging with the course.

Design choices are informed by availability of resources rather than what is best practice for digital accessibility.

Create explicit opportunities for course teams to consider digital accessibility.



Effective course management supports engaging, challenging and transformative learning experiences for learners in a blended and digital environment and embeds processes for continuous improvement.

Course management





There is a clear alignment between the course and relevant provider strategies for blended and digital learning.



Conditions for achieving success
Course documentation clearly articulates how the provision interfaces with wider provider strategies, including blended and digital learning.

Potential roadblocks
There is no holistic, agreed provider-level approach to blended and digital learning.

Overcoming roadblocks
Ensure organisational approaches to digital and blended learning are articulated, well-communicated and easily accessible to staff and learners.

Subject specialists responsible for course development are unaware of wider provider strategies.

Consider holding regular briefing events and assigning 'digital champions' within disciplinary areas to heighten awareness and help develop staff and student digital capabilities.

Subject specialists do not have the required knowledge and skills to develop blended and digital learning.

Map staff digital capabilities and ensure staff are supported to acquire the skills and understanding required to develop blended and digital learning.

Ensure there are opportunities for academic staff to meet with learning technologists (where applicable) to discuss course requirements and to help with their skills development.



The use of blended and digital approaches, and their purpose, is clear to learners



Conditions for achieving success

The use of blended and digital approaches on the course is clearly communicated to learners and explicit in all documentation.

There is space for academics to discuss their expectations of learners, in relation to blended and digital, and this is made explicit to all learners.

There is space for learners to discuss their expectations of learning, in relation to blended and digital, and this is made explicit to course teams.

Potential roadblocks

Learners misunderstand blended and digital approaches, and what is expected of them.

Insufficient explanation is given to the purpose of blended and digital approaches.

Staff are unaware of student expectations regarding digital and blended learning.

Overcoming roadblocks

Consider a dedicated 'digital induction' for learners, to develop confidence and competence and set expectations.

Regularly reinforce the aims of blended and digital approaches within all teaching, learning and assessment activity.

Ensure students have channels and space (formal or informal) to discuss their expectations regarding digital and blended learning.



Synchronous and asynchronous activities interact seamlessly leading to positive learning experiences.

Synchronous and asynchronous activity is clearly sequenced.

Learner experience is central to the sequencing of synchronous and asynchronous activity.

Conditions for achieving success

Failure to consider the sequencing of synchronous and asynchronous activity.

Failure to consider learner experience in the sequencing of synchronous and asynchronous activity, leading to potential practical difficulties in implementation - for example, insufficient time allowed for learners to move between different types of activity.

Potential roadblocks

Ensure that the sequencing of activity is actively considered at design stage and throughout later planning, such as timetabling.

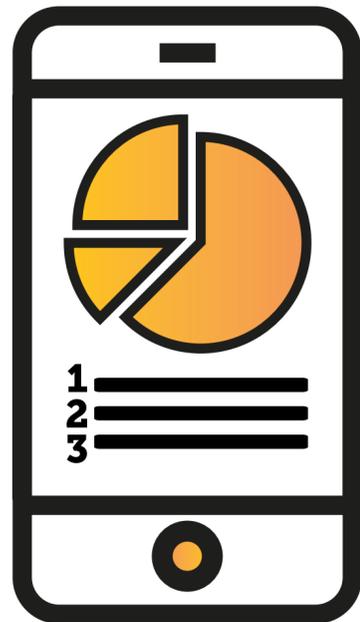
When sequencing, make space to reflect on the 'learner journey', giving particular thought to practicalities. For example, if learners are moving from synchronous on-campus activity to synchronous online activity, is there appropriate time and resource (including IT facilities) to enable them to do this easily?

Overcoming roadblocks





Data drives a culture of continuous improvement, and is used to trigger interventions as required.



Conditions for achieving success

Courses have clear systems of monitoring and evaluation.

Data generated by learner analytics is fully utilised in course review.

There is a strategic approach to the management of learner data.

Potential roadblocks

Limited learner engagement with evaluation.

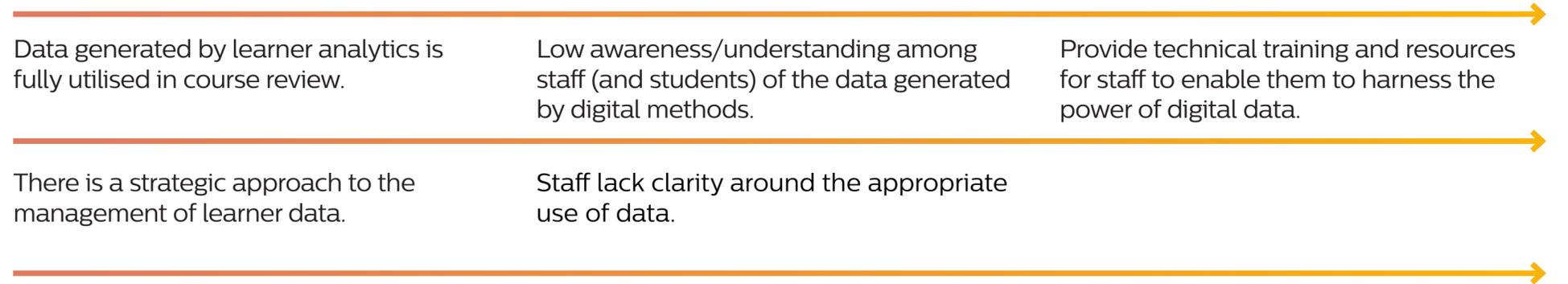
Low awareness/understanding among staff (and students) of the data generated by digital methods.

Staff lack clarity around the appropriate use of data.

Overcoming roadblocks

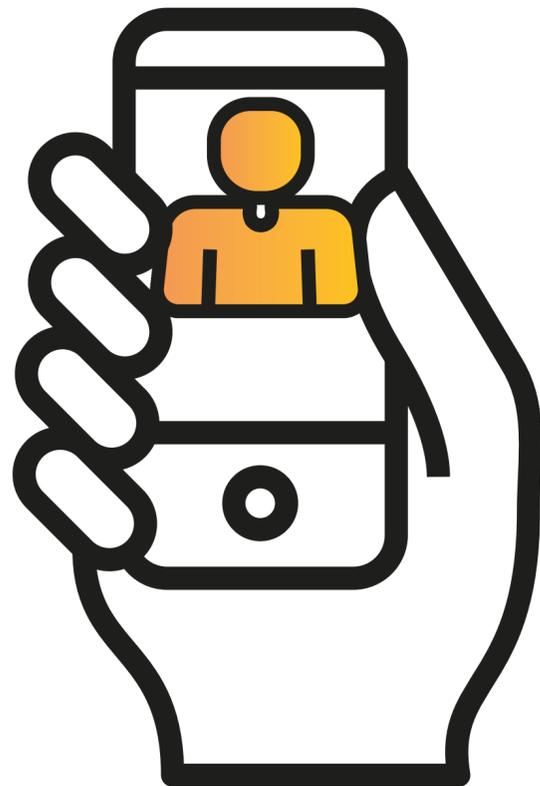
Clearly communicate to learners the importance of evaluation; provide real-world examples of how learner perspectives have led to course improvements. Consider creative and engaging ways in which to involve learners.

Provide technical training and resources for staff to enable them to harness the power of digital data.





Learner engagement is actively managed.



Processes are in place to monitor and review learner engagement.

Staff do not engage with relevant data or learning analytics (where available).

Create a clear monitoring plan that harnesses data and (where available) learning analytics generated in digital and blended modes, such as regular audits of asynchronous student engagement with learning resources.

Provide opportunities for staff development around the use of data and learning analytics (where available).

Escalation systems are used to target support where needed - for example, case consultation meetings with course lead and support staff where learners fail to meet engagement targets.

Staff and students lack clarity around processes to manage student engagement.

Ensure processes for managing student engagement, and their purpose, are explicit to staff and students.

Provide learners with formal and informal space for collaboration and discussion with academic staff, professional services staff (as appropriate) and peers. This may help reveal teaching and learning issues that have the potential to cause low engagement from learners and therefore may need to be addressed.

Learn from best practice across the institution. Consider areas that have particularly high levels of student engagement and identify areas of practice that can usefully be replicated.



The course fosters a clear sense of digital community.



Conditions for achieving success

There are clear structures and opportunities to enable the development of community in digital and blended contexts.

There are multiple opportunities for interaction between all members of the course community in a digital environment.

Potential roadblocks

Issues of community are neglected. There is a failure to appreciate the need for specific actions to encourage and grow digital communities.

Lack of awareness/familiarity with ways of nurturing communities in a digital and blended environment.

Overcoming roadblocks

Deploy a range of different tools and methods to foster formal and informal interactions - both between learners and between staff and learners. For example, encourage students to establish online study groups.



Learning resources are appropriately maintained.

The quality of learning resources is regularly reviewed.

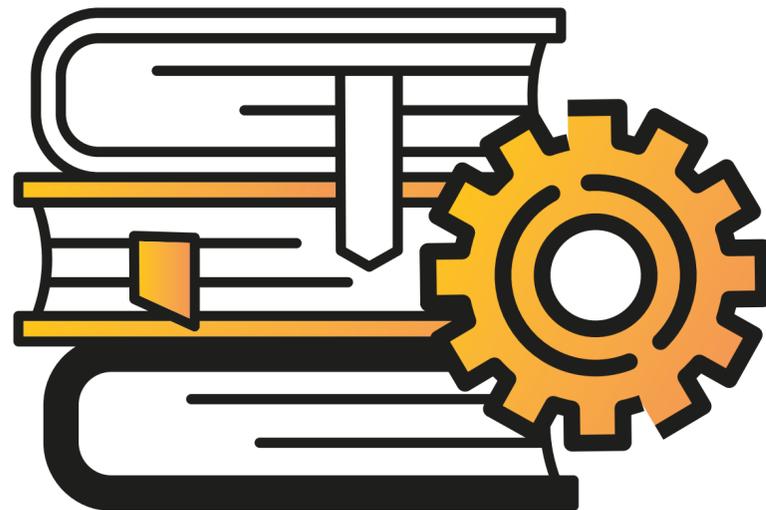
Staff time constraints lead to resources not being reviewed or updated, resulting in a decline in course currency.

Ensure there are regular opportunities for course teams to review and update resources across all levels of provision.

Intellectual property is clearly defined in relation to online learning resources and open educational resources.

Ownership and appropriate uses of different forms of resources are unclear, potentially leading to impoverished learning experiences.

Clearly articulate and document the ways in which different types of learning resources will be used and managed.





Equality, diversity and inclusion is fully considered and enabled across all learning communities.



Structures are in place to ensure all learners can participate fully in blended and digital learning.

Failure to identify potential barriers to participation caused by introduction of new technologies.

Conduct regular equality impact assessments of digital teaching and learning practice, including use of digital technologies. Put in place an action plan to address any identified inequalities.

Ensure learners with specific needs have individual study plans recognising their needs in a digital environment.

The course is a 'safe space', fostering mutual respect and valuing the lived realities of all learners.

Insufficient monitoring of online/virtual spaces resulting in poor student experiences.

Co-create a 'netiquette' agreement with learners.

Misuse of online/virtual spaces

Develop monitoring and moderation systems, consider sharing these roles among learners and staff.

Shared understanding of key terms used

We acknowledge the evolving use of terms within hybrid, blended and digital delivery in higher education. In order to support a shared understanding, the table below offers definitions of the terms that are used throughout the playbook.

Asynchronous learning	Learning that can be undertaken independently and not at a specific time.
Blended learning	Learning delivered via a number of different methods, usually including face-to-face and online.
Co-creation/co-creators	Most frequently used with reference to students but may also be used in relation to other stakeholders such as employers, co-creation refers to a process of design that actively involves and includes the ‘co-creator’ in all aspects of development – from conception to conclusion.
Digital learning	Digital learning is a relatively recent term that is often used by providers to refer to learning that uses digital information and relevant digital technologies, where ‘digital’ means involving or relating to the use of computer technology.
Digital literacy	An individual’s ability to use digital information and relevant technologies to find, evaluate, create and communicate information. This type of literacy requires cognitive and technical skills.
Digital poverty	The recognition that some students have less or inferior access to devices by which to engage with digital approaches to learning. This also extends to a lack of access to an internet connection with little or no bandwidth which would negatively impact the quality of their digital learning experience.
Hybrid learning/ hybrid-flexible/HyFlex	Hybrid learning and teaching is designed to be delivered online (remotely) and onsite simultaneously, allowing learners to move between the two methods of delivery seamlessly. Learners are therefore given agency to construct their own ways of engaging with hybrid learning. Some institutions are now using the term ‘hybrid-flexible’ or ‘HyFlex’ learning to describe provision where learners have high levels of choice in whether they participate in learning events in person or digitally.
Learning outcomes	What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.
Modes of delivery	The different ways of making courses and provision available, such as hybrid, online, on-campus.
Modes of study	The different ways of undertaking study, such as full-time, part-time, or accelerated.
Online learning	Online learning is used to refer to learning activity that requires some form of digital engagement from learners – for example, participating in a live streamed lecture from home, or accessing resources stored on a digital learning platform.
Synchronous learning	Learning together at the same time – sometimes referred to as learning in ‘real’ time.

Sources for definitions

- [QAA Glossary](#)
- [Building a Taxonomy for Digital Learning](#)

Additional resources

- [A Launch Pad for Future Success: Using Outcomes-Based Approaches to Scaffold the Pandemic Year and Build for the Future](#)
- [A Launch Pad for Future Success: Overview Report](#)
- [A Launch Pad for Future Success: Detailed Tools and Case Studies](#)
- [Anti-Racist Curriculum Project](#)
- [Assessing with Integrity in Digital Delivery](#)
- [Creating Inclusive Subject Learning Communities](#)
- [From Pivot to Permanent: Examining Lessons Learned from the Shift Online and Hybrid Teaching and Learning](#)
- [Good Practice in Digital Delivery Case Studies](#)
- [How Good Practice in Digital Delivery and Assessment has Affected Student Engagement and Success - an Early Exploration](#)
- [Made Digital Report](#)
- [Student Participation in Co-Creation](#)
- [Subject Benchmark Statements](#)
- [The Impact of Good Practice on Digital Delivery on Student Engagement, Progression and Achievement](#)
- [TESTA: Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment](#)
- [Questions to Inform a Toolkit for Enhancing Quality in a Digital Environment](#)
- [Questions for Reflection: Creating Inclusive Subject Learning Communities](#)
- [UK Quality Code for Higher Education Advice and Guidance: Course Design and Development](#)

QAA Collaborative Enhancement Projects

QAA has funded a number of [Collaborative Enhancement Projects](#) covering aspects of practice relevant to the issues covered in this playbook. Four projects of particular relevance are:

- [Active Online Reading](#) (led by the University of Lincoln)
- [A Flexible Learning Toolkit to Enhance Module Design](#) (led by the University of Derby)
- [Blended Learning Review](#) (led by Leeds College of Building and York College)
- [Student Experience and Student Expectations in a Post-Pandemic Teaching and Learning Environment](#) (led by Coventry University)

Acknowledgements

QAA is grateful to the following colleagues for their constructive feedback and suggestions as we developed this resource:

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- 👤 Dr Marcus Wood, Head of Quality and Standards, Buckinghamshire New University
- 👤 QAA Student Strategic Advisory Committee

This report is published in QAA's capacity as a membership organisation. It is available on our [Membership Resources site](#).