

## Student Experience Committee

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Agenda Item 9.4

Paper 71/15

Status: Open

Purpose: To approve

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(the paper has received extensive input from members of both teams)

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## Designing for effective learning (*revised*)

**NILE design standards, expectations and guidance for an excellent student experience - on campus and online**

### 1. Recommendation

This Committee is invited to consider and approve the proposed paper.

### 2. Background

In January 2012, a framework covering the [minimum standards](#) expected on a NILE site was created. This was approved at University SEC on [1<sup>st</sup> March, 2012](#) and now forms the basis of the **Foundation** level of quality (sections A and B, below).

We recognise pedagogic design as a key element to enhance the student experience across different modes of study (Figure 1, SEC 2014–02–27, paper 24). **Approval is now sought to add the minimum expectations in relation to the design of NILE sites for ‘blended’ and ‘online’ learning (section C)**, in the context of the definitions provided in the Appendix. These two ‘levels’ or sets of expectations align with the approach to learning and teaching and programme redesign guidelines in preparation for Waterside.

Support, examples of good practice, case studies and further guidance on all sections (including bespoke sessions where necessary) are available from the Learning Technology Team and the Institute of Learning and Teaching.

2a. Paper 48/15 was originally presented to SEC on 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2015. The current paper reflects changes suggested at this event and during the SSECs which followed. Key changes are:

- In section A changing “(2) Module Guide” to “(2) About this module”; added Lecture recordings (Panopto) to (4) Module Activities; and added Aspire details to (5) Reading List.
- In Section B changing ‘should’ to ‘must’ to support accessibility agendas
- Section C reformatted to separate out blended from online

### 3. NILE design standards, expectations and guidance for an excellent student experience - on campus and online

#### A) Minimum standards for content in all NILE sites

	NILE menu bar item	Information provided within each item (right hand-side frame of NILE)
1	Announcements	Clear details about any information, changes and updates that students need to be aware of. The calendar tool and notifications dashboard may be used to structure key announcements and planning information.
2	About this module	This area may be used to welcome students to the module and outline the key content. Information on induction may also be provided within this area. Important information relating to the module which are not covered elsewhere in the site should be in this area (e.g. learning outcomes, timetables and deadlines.). If there is a downloadable module guide then it should be in this area.
3	Contacts	This section should list all of the key people who may need to be contacted by students enrolled onto the module. Ideally there should be a photo and full contact information along with clearly specified 'office hours' and guidance on how soon students can expect a reply - it doesn't have to be straight away, as long as they know they should not to expect that! Some questions may be easily answered by peers, so encourage students to post general or frequently asked questions to a discussion forum, to which staff should also contribute. Avoid the use of email to answer general questions many times.
4	Module activities	This is an area for material and activities relating directly to the module, such as presentations, lecture recordings (Panopto), hand-outs, e-tivities, blogs, discussion forums, etc. Sensible use of folders (e.g. week by week or topic by topic) is necessary to create a logical layout for students to be able to find materials. Most recent resources should be clearly labelled or near the top to avoid scrolling. Adaptive release may be used to selectively display content as needed. Consider 'bite sized' chunks of material (video, audio or text) rather than overly long content.
5	Reading list	The key reading material for the module with links to the source location. This may include reading lists, video guides, subject specific resource sites, etc. The Aspire online reading list software should be used as the University's standard tool for creating and accessing reading lists.
6	Assessment information	Assessment briefs and assessment-specific materials should be here. This area should note the assignment deadlines for the module (submission and feedback dates) including re-sit dates. Details on the procedure for feedback to students on assessment should be clearly displayed. Assignment submission points <b>should not</b> be included in this section.
7	Submit your work	A clear location for students to go to in order to submit assignments. Only Turnitin (and other) submission points should be included here.
8	Feedback and grades	This is a NILE tool area into which you <b>do not</b> have to put customised content. Grades from the Grade Centre will be displayed to students here.
9	University support and resources	Additional resource links that may be of use to students (e.g. SkillsHub). This link <b>does not</b> require any action from staff.

## B) Minimum standards for layout and format in all NILE sites

	Design considerations	What it means to you
1	Consistent colour scheme and layout for the module	Colour may be used to link together related modules and content. Readability of the module and the overall design must be considered.
2	Content accessible to a range of devices	Standard formats must be used, such as PDF or Word for text-based documents, JPG for photos, PNG for graphics, MP3 for audio and Kaltura for video clips. Avoid formats that require specialist software or plug-ins, unless they are required for the subject of study.
3	Content accessible for all students	Materials must be created with accessibility in mind. For example, Word documents must be formatted using Styles and Headers to ensure compatibility with screen readers and easy conversion to PDF. Tutors must ensure that all content being used is accessible in all countries where students are based.

## C) Minimum expectations for NILE sites designed for blended and online delivery

Please refer to **Figure 1** and the **definitions** below.

### C.1 Minimum expectations applicable to **both** blended and wholly online delivery

	Guidelines	What it means to you
1	Active learning opportunities	Students should be provided with a range of active learning opportunities on all NILE sites designed for blended or online delivery. Active learning opportunities imply students doing more than accessing information: online activities should provide learners with an opportunity to make sense of the content they engage with. The tasks can be either individual or group based, for example, by completing an individual reflective journal, participating in a discussion forum or collaborating in a wiki.
2	Staff visibility	Within blended or online modules, some or all of your <i>contact time</i> (see definition below) will take place online. Academic staff must be visible and available to their students on a regular basis. This means participating actively in discussion forums, commenting on blog posts, making regular announcements about how the class is progressing, and in general, taking an active role in the formation of a community of learning.
3	Synchronous and asynchronous technologies	Whilst a proportion of the teaching and most of the online learning activities will take place asynchronously (to allow maximum learner flexibility), consideration as to the use of synchronous (real-time) sessions is recommended. However, in order not to disadvantage any student, attendance at synchronous sessions will not normally be compulsory. All synchronous sessions will usually be recorded and made available to all students afterwards.

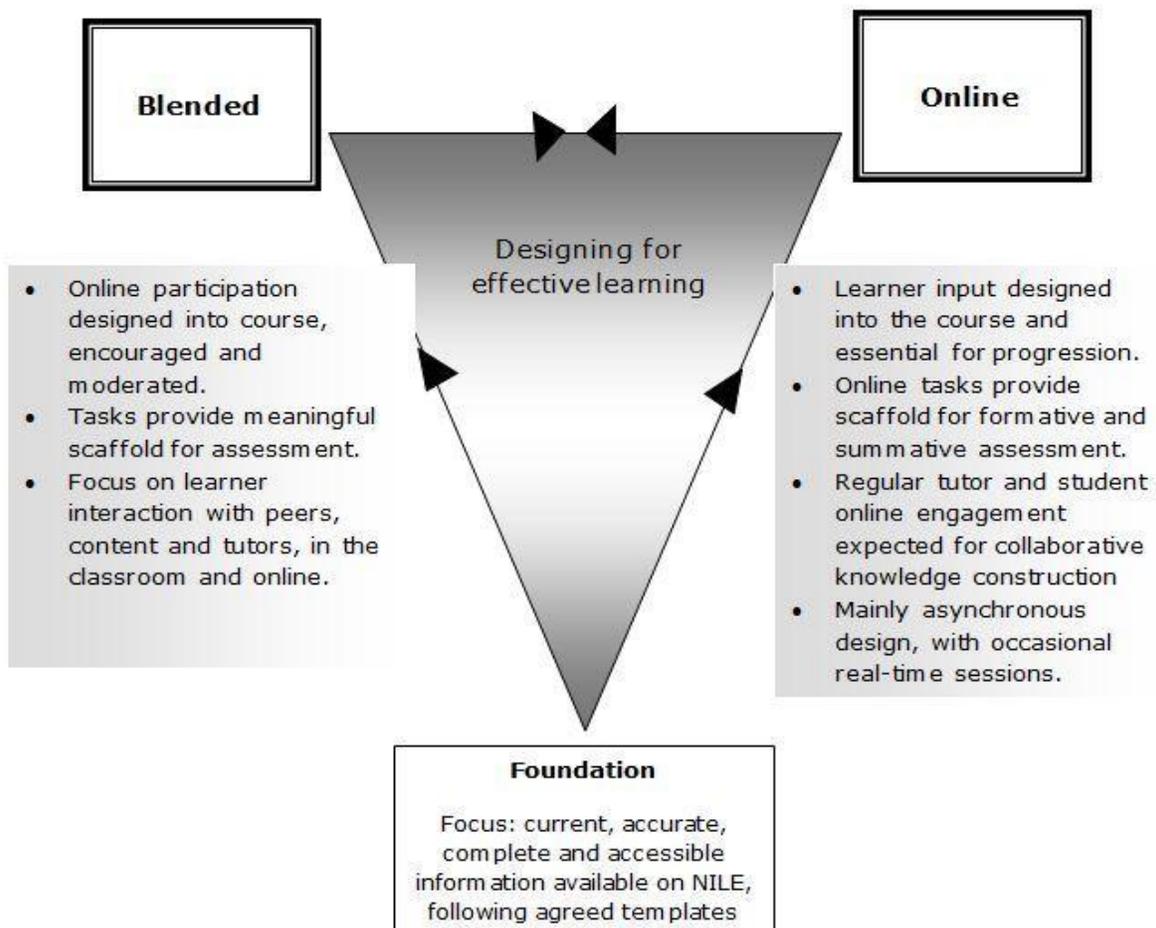
## **C.2** Minimum expectations applicable to **blended learning** modules

The number of active learning opportunities present in the NILE site will be dependent on the particular mix of face-to-face and online teaching. In modules where a high proportion of the teaching takes place online, a greater number of active learning opportunities will be present in NILE. The tasks or e-tivities should be designed to provide a meaningful and valuable scaffold to the learning goals: what matters is what students **do** with the resources provided, rather than the resources themselves. Online learning activities should enhance classroom-based work and vice-versa. This can be achieved in a variety of ways (see Figure 1).

## **C.3** Minimum expectations applicable to **online learning** modules

In these modules students will have frequent opportunities to engage in active learning opportunities online. Some of these will be individual, some will involve participation (such as contributing their own thoughts to a discussion board and responding to the input of others), and some will involve collaboration (such as working as part of a group to complete a task). These online tasks will scaffold the formative and summative assessment and are critical to achieving the learning outcomes (Figure 1). Critically, blended and online modules do not teach themselves: tutor engagement and regular input are essential for the success of the module.

Figure 1: designing for effective learning



# Appendix

## Definitions

### 1. Distance learning module

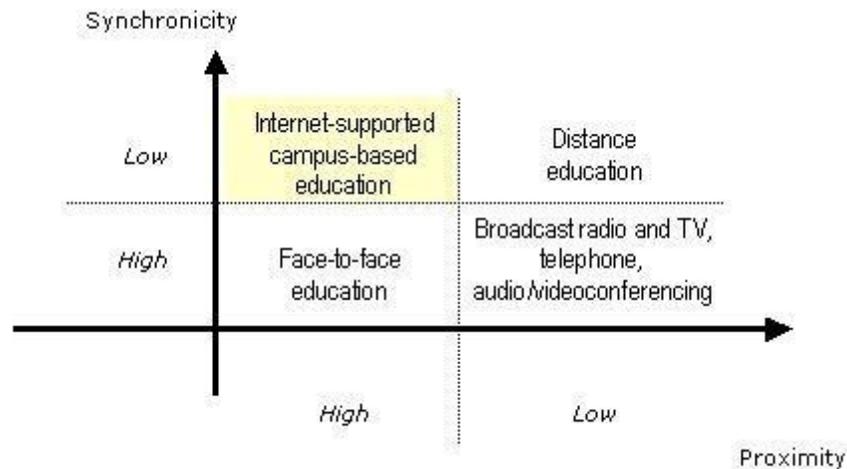
A distance learning module is one in which (1) the entirety of the module is taught via the virtual learning environment (VLE), and (2) students use that environment to access a variety of pre-prepared learning materials, including open educational resources (OERs) and to interact with their peers and tutors. Whilst a distance learning module does not involve any face-to-face contact time, this does not mean that such modules do not have any staff contact time, as an essential part of a distance learning module is the work that staff do to support and guide students via the use of discussion boards, blogs, journals, virtual classrooms, etc., and to develop the learning community. A distance learning module may require the same or even more staff contact time than a face-to-face module. Distance learning modules should not be confused with MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), which are typically short, free, carry no academic credit, and make minimal use (and often no use) of student-tutor contact time.

### 2. Blended learning or flexible learning module

A blended learning or flexible learning module is one in which some of the teaching and learning takes place in face-to-face sessions and some of the teaching and learning takes place online, within the VLE. Students access a variety of different types of learning materials, including OERs, and take part in individual and collaborative activities which are used to support, enhance and add value to face-to-face sessions. This kind of module requires students to come to campus on a regular basis. Well designed blended or flexible modules enable face-to-face contact time with students, despite often being less than in a traditional course, to be used to its maximum pedagogical effect. The virtual aspect of a blended or flexible learning module must involve more than simply access to content – students need to be actively involved in tasks within the VLE, not simply accessing content and passively watching or reading. In other words, using NILE solely as a content repository is a good example of poor blended or flexible teaching practice.

Figure 2 (below) sets out the relationship between different types of module design based on synchronicity and proximity, with *blended learning* being represented in the upper-left corner (referred to as internet-supported campus-based education).

Figure 2



**Image source:** Armellini, A. & Grunberg, J. (2002) From face-to-face to distance: models for the incorporation of e-learning in Higher Education. [Cuadernos de Investigación Educativa](#), 1(10), 5-10. [in Spanish]

### 3. Technology-enhanced learning and teaching (TEL)

TEL is an umbrella term that encompasses all deliberate, explicit attempts to teach or learn using different digital technologies in the design and delivery of a course. The key word is “enhanced”: the principle is that these technologies enable tutors and students to do what it would not be possible to do without them. The technology thus “enhances” the teaching and learning process in a variety of ways, for example, by enabling higher levels of participation in a discussion or collaboration in a project, or by offering parity of learning opportunities in terms of time, place and pace (e.g. by making it possible for remote learners to join a debate, regardless of location or time zones). A blended learning module (section 2) may exemplify TEL if the technology is deliberately used to enhance specific aspects of the provision, i.e., if the chosen technologies have an explicit pedagogical purpose.

### 4. Online course

For the purposes of this paper, an online course is equivalent to a distance learning course (section 1): the University will not consider the development of any distance learning course that is not online. The occasional use of printed matter (for example, sending physical books out to distance learners) does not change this definition. Students on an online course have no face-to-face contact with staff.

### 5. Contact time

Contact time refers to the amount of time during which personalised (as opposed to *mass*) communication between tutors and students occurs. That communication may happen individually or in groups of students. For clarity, let us consider two types of contact time:

- a. **Face-to-face contact time** (bottom-left quadrant of Figure 1). This is the time spent by students and tutors together in seminars, tutorials, practicals, lab sessions, etc. It refers to same-place, same-time, two-way communication (typically on the campus, but other locations are possible, such as placements), which is relatively easy to measure (for example, X hours per week). Many universities include lectures in this category. Given that lectures are one of the most impersonal

settings in which information is delivered, we exclude broadcast-style lectures from our concept of contact time. Face-to-face contact time is NOT about broadcasting information, or transmitting it to the masses. This is a potential market differentiator for us.

- b. **Online contact time** (relevant to all quadrants of figure 1) refers to the time during which technology-enabled communications occur between tutors and students. As these exchanges may occur both synchronously (e.g. videoconferencing, Skype, telephone or other real-time tools) and asynchronously (document sharing, blogging, discussion forums, etc), online contact time is much harder to measure. The key principle here is that any 'mass communication' activity, such as an email message sent to a large group of students, or a webinar in which a lecturer delivers information to many students at once ('broadcasting'), are not seen as contact time: such interventions lack any form of personalisation.