ICHAS

Section 3 – Policies and Procedures associated with Quality in ICHAS			
Subject:		Procedures associated with assuring the Quality of the Online Only Learning Environment	
Date Approved by Academic Council:			August 2021
Policy Version	1/2021	Date due for Revision	February 2024
Parent Policy		Policy for assuring the Quality of Blended Learning	

INTRODUCTION

Within the approaches to Blended Learning used by the College, there are procedures set out in this section relating to the key areas of:

- Developing Online Resources
- Positive Engagement on Online Platforms
- Monitoring and Supporting the Virtual classroom
- Procedures to Ensure the Quality of the Online Teaching & Learning Space (Module Page within the VLE)

RESPONSIBILITIES

ROLE/ PERSON	RESPONSIBILITY
Educational Technology Manager	Support and monitor the virtual classroom. Ensure students and lecturers are trained to use tools. Review and evaluate operation of procedures.
Programme Director	Liaise with the Educational Technology Manager, IS Manager and programme staff relating to the overall quality of the Blended Learning teaching and learning experience and make appropriate reports to Programme Boards and the relevant Director of Studies.
Lecturer/ Module Leader	Liaise with colleagues in the development of online resources, delivery of virtual classroom sessions and use of discussion forums.
IS Manager	Ensure the IS infrastructure is suitable and appropriately maintained so as to adequately support Blended Learning Environments
QAE Officer	Quality reports. Review procedures in collaboration with Educational Technologist.

PROCEDURES

Procedures for ensuring the Authenticity of Learner Identity

Pre-enrolment

- Learners apply to the college through a secure online portal, using identification data including name, address, e-mail address, home or work address or telephone number, date of birth, country of birth, PPS number
- Students will be required to send relevant supporting statements & declarations, and proof of identity (e.g. passport) which will be verified during the selection process
- The email address submitted by an applicant during the application process is used to communicate their login information once an offer has been made and acceptance confirmed. At this stage, the applicant becomes an enrolled learner.

Post-Enrolment

- Learners' user accounts are created upon enrolment, in an automated process that uses the data provided during application.
- Following enrolment, all communication is exclusively through the learner's college email address.
- ICHAS uses a single sign-on approach, whereby all online platforms are accessed through that learner's unique username/password.
- The user image provided by the learner during application cascades through to their user account and can be used by teaching and administrative staff to identify learners.
- Learners are not permitted to alter this image without first contacting and approval from their programme coordinator.
- In general, College staff will ensure that they are only responding to a student's official College email address, or students' personal email address as registered with the College SIS, in all written communications.
- When communicating with students on the phone, staff should verify the phone number used to make the call is one of the numbers registered with the College SIS.
- In the event that the number the call is being made on is hidden or different, staff will ask the student to verify their identity by requesting two pieces of information such as student ID, registered address, or date of birth.
- Where there is cause for concern in relation to the validity of a student's identity-, an appropriate member of the College team (e.g., Registrar or Director of Studies), will contact the student to arrange a face meeting.
- The process for validating a learner's identity within the context of an examination is outlined within the Procedures for Remotely Proctored Examinations.

Minimum Technological Requirements for participation on Online Courses

Students participating on Online Programmes will be informed of the following requirements during the admissions process:

- 5Mbps broadband speed connection at a minimum (connection should be reliable and stable enough to enable satisfactory participation in synchronous virtual classrooms using videoconferencing software without disruption or frequent disconnection).
- Laptop or desktop computer with recommended minimum specification Intel Core i3 (or equivalent) and 4GB RAM) or Apple M1 chipset (or later)
- Laptop or desktop computer running Windows 10 or MacOS Sierra or later.
- A working detachable webcam
- Audio Hardware including working speakers and microphone / wired headphone and microphone allowed
- Screen Resolution 1024 x 768 minimum
- Web Browsers:
  - Chromium based web browser (Chrome or Edge)
  - Firefox
  - Safari

Procedures for Induction/Orientation to Support Student Readiness for Online Learning & Virtual Classes

Comprehensive information on the form and manner of blended learning used in ICHAS programmes is available from the ICHAS website. The Induction introduces key concepts and technologies to the learners, and they also receive an introduction to Online Learning which is a short course delivered over several weeks that ensures students have the opportunity to develop digital skills slowly and with robust support.
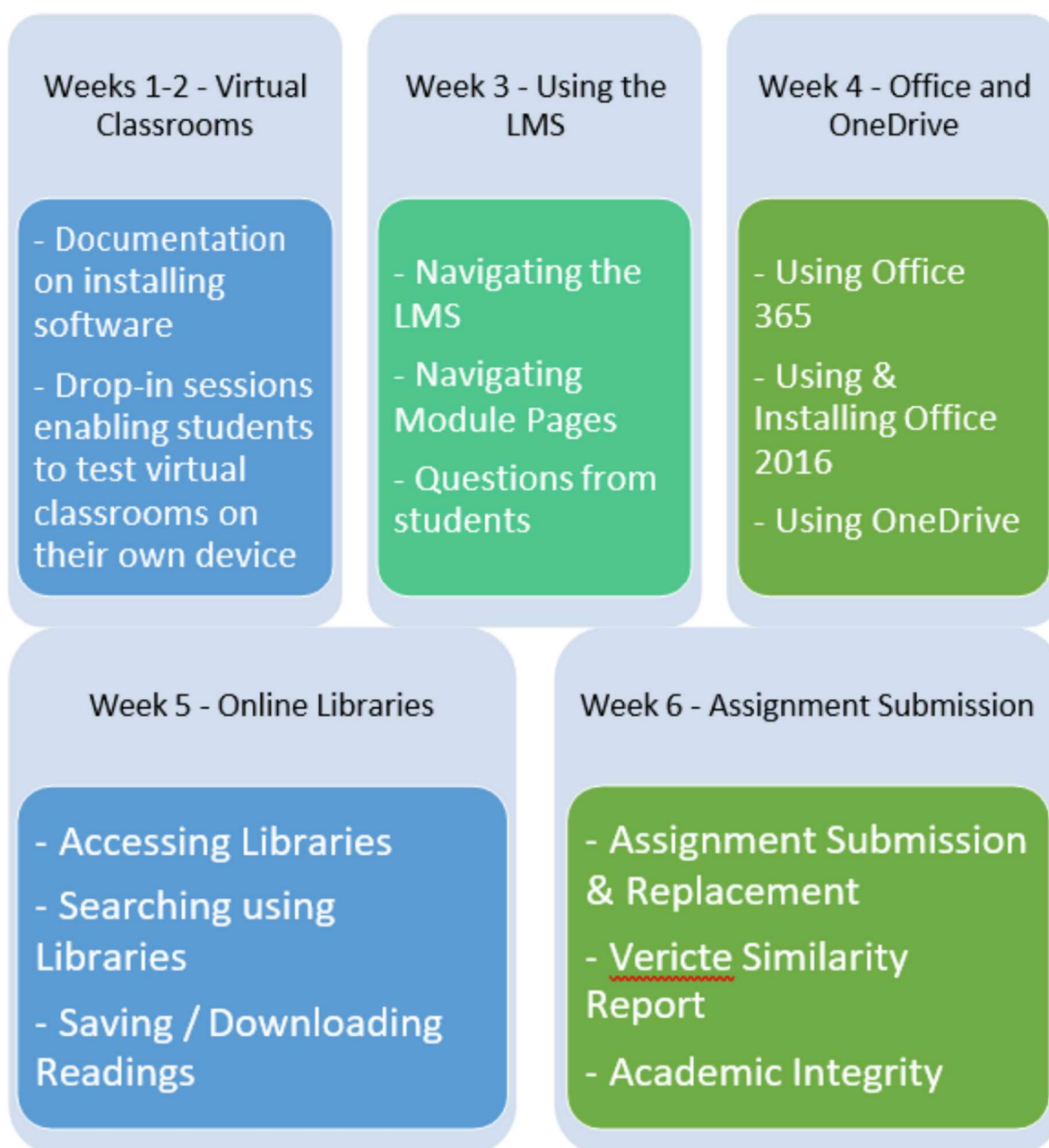
Induction Day:

At induction day, the information systems team demonstrate the key educational technologies that students will use, including;

- The process for logging in to the Learning Management System is outlined.
- The Password reset process is outlined next, demonstrating how students will always be able to access their account.
- The structure and navigation of the Learning Management System is outlined next. Students are shown how to access their student email and download Office 365 software.
- Students are then shown how to access their modules. The module template is explained – all modules have a consistent appearance and outline to ensure easy navigation.
- Students will be shown where to access important information, including:
  - Module Descriptor and Learning Outcomes
  - Assessment Information & Upload links
  - Virtual Classroom & Class Recording Links
  - Communication tools such as instant messaging and discussion forums.
  - How to launch and access their virtual classroom. An overview is provided of the virtual classroom itself, outlining its use and capabilities in a brief simulated session.

The educational technology overview session concludes with an outline of the "Introduction to Online Learning" course. Students are encouraged to attend and shown how to access it.

Introduction to Online Learning

As part of the formal introduction to the online learning environment students are provided with access to "Introduction to Online Learning" which is a 6-week orientation programme intended to enable students to learn about their educational technologies at a comfortable pace. The course exists as an optional, unassessed module available from the Learning Management System. It is delivered entirely online on the LMS to promote meta-learning about the LMS itself through active use of same. Each weekly session covers a separate topic and digital skills that students need to acquire to engage with their programme.

Weeks 1-2 - Virtual Classrooms

- Documentation on installing software

- Drop-in sessions enabling students to test virtual classrooms on their own device

Week 3 - Using the LMS

- Navigating the LMS

- Navigating Module Pages

- Questions from students

Week 4 - Office and OneDrive

- Using Office 365

- Using & Installing Office 2016

- Using OneDrive

Week 5 - Online Libraries

- Accessing Libraries

- Searching using Libraries

- Saving / Downloading Readings

Week 6 - Assignment Submission

- Assignment Submission & Replacement

- Vericte Similarity Report

- Academic Integrity

Ongoing Supports to Enhance Student Digital Literacy and Skills

ICHAS recognises that the need for digital skills development does not cease following the Induction and Orientation process.

- The educational technologist is available for students to discuss their learning needs.
- All virtual classrooms are actively supported by the information systems support team.

- The support team provides ad-hoc support as needed to all students to resolve once-off technical issues as they arise, and they make recommendations of resources for the enhancement of digital skills.
- The LMS contains resources and advice on the enhancement of digital skills.

Reminders are posted regularly in the Student Dashboard page of the LMS to point students towards resources that can support them in:
- Using online libraries
- Electronic submission of assignments
- Understanding similarity reports and replacing assignments with a high similarity score
- Using virtual classrooms effectively

Procedure for Developing Online Learning Resources

The development of online learning resources and activities at ICHAS uses an adapted ADDIE model to achieve specific outcomes. Online Learning Resources typically include podcasts, narrated presentations, interactive resources, and activities such as discussion fora, quizzes and self-directed online learning components of blended learning.

The Adapted ADDIE model refers to the following processes:

- **Analyse**: This phase clarifies the instructional objectives of the learning resource(s) and its place in the wider context of the module or programme.
  Ownership: Lecturer, Educational technologist, Module or Programme Lead
- **Design**: Appropriate modes of learning and instruction to meet the learning objectives are considered and settled upon.
  Ownership: Lecturer, Educational technologist, Module or Programme Lead
- **Develop**: The development phase is where the lecturer or other subject matter expert works with the Educational Technologist to develop content and learning interactions in line with what was discussed during the design phase. During this phase, content is written, and graphics, audio, readings, and other multimedia are produced or curated.
  Ownership: Lecturer, Educational technologist
- **Implement**: The learning resource(s) or activities are delivered to the Learning Management System (LMS) for use by students. Direction is provided by the instructor around the use and objectives of the resource.
  Ownership: Lecturer, Educational technologist
- **Evaluate**: Learning resources are evaluated both formatively and summatively. Formative evaluation is iterative and is done throughout the design and development processes. Peer review is an important aspect of this formative evaluation. Summative evaluation utilises student feedback, analysis of student engagement with learning resources.
  Ownership: QAE Officer

Procedures to Support Positive Communication and Engagement on Online Platforms

These are ways to promote effective communication between tutors and students, and students with their peers. Again, these are intended as a baseline, are not exhaustive, and lecturers may expand according to teaching need.

- Provide a communication statement outlining your preferred method of communication and indicate an approximate response time. Be clear about what communication method you will not respond to (e.g., explicitly state if you will not respond to Moodle IM).
- Set up a Q&A forum - include a forum that students can post in to receive help and support with course content related questions. Students should post queries here rather than sending by email (as others can then see the responses). It is recommended that an agreed response time is published to students.
- Set up a student forum - it is recommended that a general discussion forum is set up for students, in which they are asked to introduce themselves when enrolling on the course. They can then continue to use these forums to interact with their peers e.g., sharing resources etc.
- Module evaluation - include an online module evaluation form so students can evaluate the module.
- Provide regular or continuous opportunities for students to feedback - Use Moodle survey activities or MS forms to provide students with opportunities to provide feedback on areas they may be struggling to understand.

Engagement across platforms is monitored by the lecturer and the assistant lecturer where appropriate. Lecturers respond to posts and moderate academic discussion. Lecturer or Assistant Lecturers ensures discussion is taking place respectfully.

- Staff and students are required and supported to have necessary technological affordances in place prior to the commencement of any sessions this includes access passwords, stable internet, headsets, webcam.
- All participants should be identifiable and except in agreed circumstances with the lecturer students will be required to have their camera on
- Communications in an online environment lack the visual signals that participants can pick up on in a face-to-face conversation, and it is easy for misunderstandings to arise. Before responding, participants should first consider if they are misunderstanding what is being said or the intention of the originator. If still concerned, students should alert their lecturer.
- Lecturers and Students are encouraged to remain topic focussed and that online platforms are used for stated learning objectives.
- Engagement is expected to be respectful, personable, and courteous and productive. All posts to online fora are monitored and the College reserves the right to delete content of an inflammatory nature. Discussions of controversial nature, unless germane to a topic of study, should be avoided.

Online platforms should not be used:
- Post illegal material
- Defame, abuse, harass, stalk, threaten or otherwise violate the rights (such as

rights of privacy and publicity) of others
- Solicit personal information from or about anyone under 18
- Solicit passwords or personally identifying information for unlawful purposes
- Collect or store other users' personal data for purposes other than establishing contact that is reasonably expected to be welcomed by such other users
- Post irrelevant material, repeatedly post the same or similar material or otherwise impose an unreasonable or disproportionately large load on the forum servers or infrastructure
- Post any unsolicited or unauthorised advertising or any other form of commercial publicity
- Post any abusive, harmful, vulgar, obscene, sexually explicit, indecent, profane, inappropriate, or racially, ethnically or otherwise objectionable material, except where the content is appropriate to the content of the forum, and you have been granted specific permission to do so and subject to the College's guidelines on said content.
- Post material that contains violence or offensive subject matter or links to an adult web site
- Post material that promotes or encourages illegal activity
- Post material that infringes any patent, trademark, trade secret, copyright, rights of privacy or publicity or other proprietary right of any party
- Post material that contains software viruses or harmful programs intended to interrupt, destroy, or limit the functionality of computer software or hardware or telecommunications equipment.

Procedures for Supporting and Monitoring the Virtual Classroom

The following procedures are in place to ensure quality in the technology supporting the synchronous virtual classroom service:

- Members of the information systems team are present during all Virtual Classroom sessions to assist online learners with any technical issues to minimise disruption to online teaching and learning
- Support staff monitor classrooms for technological issues. Minor issues are resolved as quickly as possible. Major issues are logged and documented, so that they can be investigated.
- ICHAS staff provide support through the chat facility in the virtual classroom, via e-mail and/or via telephone as appropriate to the specific technical problems and learner need or preference.
- ICHAS staff also utilise remote login technology, with the student's consent, allowing them to access the student's device and solve their technical problems as quickly as possible.
- All end-of-year student and lecturer feedback surveys forms contain explicit questions concerning student and lecturer experiences using the virtual classroom. The responses from these surveys feed into the Annual Review process, and lecturer in-service training, where appropriate.
- Reportage of teaching and learning issues also involves attendance and discussion at
- Log files, which record student activity and other learning analytics, are recorded

automatically, and kept on file for all virtual classroom events. Analytics are subsequently used in triangulating problematic interactions with resources which are detailed in reportage.

- Attendance records for all online sessions are logged automatically and maintained for 12 months.

A review of virtual classroom technology is performed on a six-monthly basis. During this review, feedback is considered, other technologies trialled, and incident report logs/ error logs considered.

The alignment of online learning with programmatic objective.

Procedures to Ensure the Quality of the Online Teaching & Learning Space (Module Page within the VLE)
Procedures around the design of the module learning space within the virtual learning environment are intended to be helpful and supportive without being overly prescriptive. These procedures provide a baseline for a quality experience while maintaining lecturer freedom to innovate and adapt their teaching to the learners' needs.

Navigation
Navigation relates you how learners find and interact with information, resources and learning events within the module.

- Add meaningful section headings to each topic/section.
- Write 'section' introductory text to orient learners in each week / topic and direct their learning.
- Organise tasks and activities in a meaningful and clearly structured way (e.g. chronologically or by topic)
- Ensure tasks have accompanying narrative text outlining how the task should be completed, time constraints (if any) and any additional technological requirements.
- Review module content prior to delivery. Check and fix / remove hyperlinks to external content if content has moved.
- Make a Welcome recording - constituting a welcome to the module, an overview of its themes and learning outcomes, and topics to be covered.
- Provide lecturer, tutor (if applicable), programme coordinator and technical support contact details.
- Include the module syllabus, learning outcomes & core/recommended readings.
- Include icebreaker activities – this ensure learners are active at course commencement.

Accessibility
This is how to make your course accessible to different learners. This may include those accessing your course using different devices e.g., mobile, as well as those with additional educational needs.

- Accessibility fundamentals:
  - Ensure fonts are large enough and sans serif – they should be at least pt11.
  - Ensure coloured text has high contrast – against backgrounds. Avoid red, green, and pink text.
  - Ensure links are descriptive – (avoiding 'click here') and open in the same window.
  - Use alt text descriptions for images – mention the key learning points, for screen-reader users (e.g., alongside the image, as a caption, or as 'alternative text').
- Provide slides used in synchronous lectures or asynchronous recordings in PowerPoint format. This enables learners with additional visual needs to manipulate content to meet their needs.

Legal Issues

This includes good copyright practices, attention to data protection issues and ensuring students have a secure environment in which to learn.

- Observe intellectual property rights and copyright legislation.
- Ensure students are aware of their rights in relation to their data.

Quality of Teaching and Learning Materials

The Lecturer and Educational Technologist will schedule regular meetings to review the suitability and effectiveness of the materials and resources. This will form the content for the reports compiled by the Educational Technology Manager and Information Systems Manager for the Quality & Standards Committee.

Quality & Stability of Online Platforms

The Information Systems Manger will ensure that systems in place underpinning the stability of the virtual classroom, virtual learning environment and all other learning platforms are updated regularly and fit for purpose. The IS manager will oversee review of these platforms twice annually, and this review will form the basis of the reports compiled by the Information Systems Manager for the Quality & Standards Committee.

The following procedures are in place to ensure the stability of the online platforms:

LMS Hosting

The core of the Learning Management System is Moodle. The other resources and services that constitute the LMS are accessed via Moodle Plugins or External Webservice. As a result, Moodle is the only part of the LMS that is provisioned directly by the college. To provide for the required level of integration and access to the information and learning systems, Moodle needs to be Cloud based.

The IS manager will ensure that an appropriate provider is selected for LMS hosting, and review this twice annually. At present, the IS Manager has commissioned a Managed

Virtual Private Server (VPS) for this purpose. The provider for this platform is currently Digital Ocean. Digital Ocean provide their services from regionally based Data Centres which ensures reliable and fast access for all users. In addition, it provides a 100% network up-time Service Level Agreement (SLA) and a 99.9% general cloud up-time SLA.

This provider ensures near 365 24/7 access to our integrated systems greatly enhancing our ability to provide online programmes. The "near" defers to the need for 2-3 hours to backup systems during the very early part of the morning.

The IS Manager will retain overall control over the management and content of the server hosted by service providers. This is covered by the College's SLA with providers. Therefore, the college ensures that all systems and processes are GDPR compliant.

Backup Systems

The College will maintain appropriate backup systems to ensure data integrity and recovery. The IS manager will review the backup systems twice annually to ensure they are fit for purpose. Currently, the college utilises two backup systems, one DigitalOcean system and another 3rd Party external system facilitated through Amazon Web Services. Utilising an alternative off-site server, DigitalOcean mirrors the content of the main server on an ongoing basis. Secondly, CloudBerry Backup leverages Amazon's AWS S3 storage to nightly backup the complete file systems.

Disaster Recovery

In the event of complete hardware failure, the IS Manager will receive an automated notification. Additionally, the managed VPS, DigitalOcean, will quickly redirect all traffic to the backup server containing the mirror of the original. This can be achieved within 30 minutes of complete failure, with minimal data loss, or loss of access. Microsoft Office 365, Zoom and our Library services all use their own robust hardware and software platforms.

GRAPHICAL PRESENTATION OF PROCEDURE
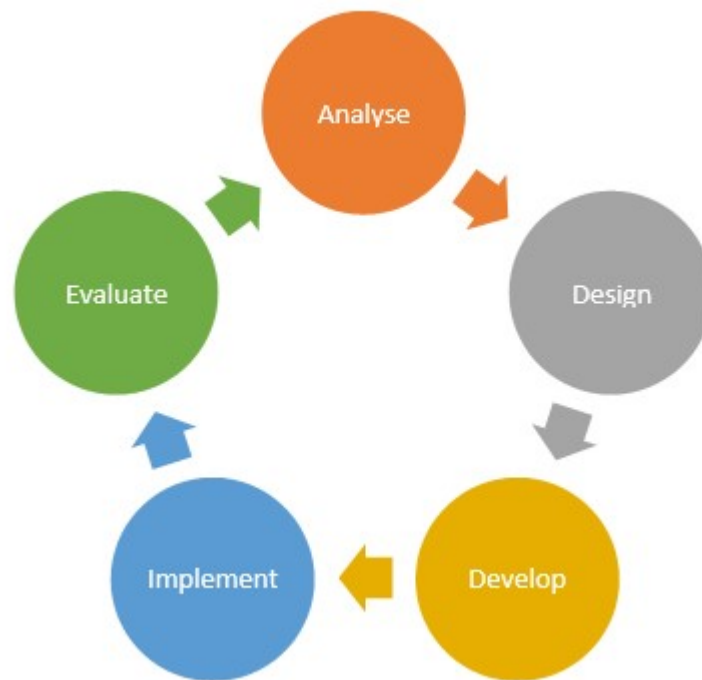The following Chart outlines a graphical representation of the ADDIE Model

Figure 1 - ADDIE Model used to develop online learning resources

The following diagram presents a graphical representation of the processes involved in the monitoring, review and quality assurance of the Virtual Classroom BSLE experience:

Figure 2 - Monitoring, review and quality assurance of the Virtual Classroom

Linked Policies & Procedures

Linked Policies	Policy on assuring the Quality of Blended Learning Environment Policy on supporting students to engage with Blended Learning
Linked Procedures	Procedures associated with assuring the Quality of the Physical Learning Environment. Procedures associated with supporting students to engage with Blended Learning.