AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY
Guidelines, Policies and Procedures

Policy Name	Online and Blended Learning Policy
Policy Number	048
Approved by	Academic Council
Date of Original Approval	April 25, 2024
Date of Revisions	-
Contact	Network of Quality, Teaching & Learning

1. Purpose: The Aga Khan University (AKU or The University) Online and Blended Learning Policy establishes principles and processes to ensure quality in implementing online and blended learning programmes, courses, and academic support services. This policy[1]strives to maintain high academic standards and promote validity and accessibility to enhance student learning experience in all modalities. Definitions of modalities and approaches are provided in Appendix A.

2. Scope: The policy applies to:
a. Current on-campus (in-person) programmes and courses that are either offered in or are under consideration or being re-designed for online and blended approaches
b. Newly proposed degree-awarding undergraduate and graduate programmes to be offered through the online and blended approaches.
c. Individual courses within an approved on-campus programme to be offered via online approaches.
d. Faculty members, students, support staff, and other stakeholders involved in supporting and/or managing the online and blended teaching.

3. Policy Statement:
a. AKU promotes blended and hybrid teaching as these approaches are now considered good practice in higher education.
b. AKU supports fully online degree awarding programmes, incorporating a thoughtful mix of synchronous and asynchronous modalities, under specific conditions outlined below:
   o The programme is offered at the graduate or postgraduate level.
   o The programme complies with the regulations of relevant regulatory bodies stated in the Online and Blended Learning Procedures document.
   o The programme satisfies all the readiness requirements outlined in the Online and Blended Learning Procedures document.
c. Undergraduate degree programmes shall, at present, be offered as on-campus programmes to ensure a robust and meaningful university experience in accordance with specifications provided by regulatory bodies. Flipped or blended learning approaches can be adopted for individual courses.

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[1] The policy has evolved from Policy 42: Policy on Responding to Disruptions of Academic Programming.

d. The University shall ensure the provision of support services and resources, including guidelines, for designing and teaching courses in various modalities and approaches.

4. Programme:
a. As with all teaching modalities, programmes that include online and blended courses shall be subject to the AKU Academic Quality Framework (Policy #030) and Curriculum Development Policy (Policy #040) and adhere to the same rigorous academic standards as on-campus programmes.
b. The University shall provide an effective and operational Learning Management System and other teaching and learning software that are robust and reliable to enable meaningful learning experiences.

6. Students Readiness:
a. Before launching an online programme, the academic unit will conduct a comprehensive needs and readiness assessment to determine its viability.
b. To the extent possible, online students shall have access to the same support services as on-campus students, including extra-curricular activities, ensuring equitable access to resources and assistance.

7. Faculty and Staff Readiness:
a. The University shall actively encourage and provide continuous professional development for faculty and staff members to enhance their online course design, assessment, and teaching skills and keep them updated on emerging technologies (e.g., AI) and digital pedagogy.

8. Accessibility and Inclusivity:
a. All online teaching will comply with accessibility standards to ensure access by persons with disabilities and accommodate diverse learning needs, including those with low bandwidth and other constraints.

9. Intellectual Property, Copyright and Privacy:
a. All persons involved in online learning shall adhere to intellectual property and copyright laws when creating, using, and sharing digital teaching and learning content.
b. The University shall provide guidelines and resources to ensure compliance with copyright regulations and ethical practices regarding the safe use of digital teaching materials.

10. Programme Monitoring and Evaluation:
a. The Registrar's Working Group will oversee the quality of online programmes in consultation with the Curriculum Advisory Committee and Digital Learning Strategy Working Group.
b. Monitoring and evaluation of online courses and programmes will be conducted using various data sources to ensure and improve quality standards.

11. Policy Review:
a. This policy and related procedures document shall be reviewed periodically to ensure relevance and effectiveness based on emerging evidence, technological advancements, and the needs of the contexts served by AKU.
b. The policy and procedures documents will be made available through the AKU website.

Online and Blended Learning

Procedure Name	Online and Blended Learning Procedures
Effective Date	April 25, 2024
Date of Revisions	-
Contact	Network of Quality, Teaching & Learning

1. Purpose

This document outlines the procedures to be followed for Online and Blended Learning at AKU. It should be read and interpreted in light of the Online and Blended Learning Policy.

2. Scope

a. The document covers definitions and procedures related to teaching and learning in various modalities and online and blended approaches.

b. "Evidence-based Checklists for Online and Blended Course Design and Facilitation Readiness and Support", Course Handbook Template, and Monitoring Report Template along with Regulatroy requirements have been provided as appendices to ensure quality of the programmes. These documents will be updated periodically.

3. Definitions of Possible Teaching and Learning Modalities and Approaches

The terms 'open', 'distance' and 'eLearning' (ODeL), or distance learning, as used by various regulatory authorities to refer to a wide range of currently available teaching modalities and approaches, are reflected in the definitions in this section.

3.1. **Programme:** "a course leading to a certificate, diploma, undergraduate degree, advanced diploma or postgraduate degree." (Academic Quality Framework: Policies and Procedures, Policy # 030)

3.2. **Course or Module**: A programme may comprise one or more courses or modules each carrying appropriate credits contributing to a degree or diploma.

3.3. **Face-to-face or In-person teaching**: Students and faculty physically present together at the same time and in the same physical space (e.g., classrooms, labs, lecture halls, clinics, studios, or other place-based learning spaces), not on the internet or by phone or video link.

3.4. **Online Teaching Modalities:**

3.4.1. **Synchronous Online**: Students and faculty interact in real-time from separate locations in this mode. Faculty can teach using video or web conferencing and/or audio-conferencing tools. Webinar is also an example of synchronous online teaching.

3.4.2. **Asynchronous Online**: This is a time-delayed mode of teaching where students are not required to participate in teaching sessions at the same time. Students can access course material whenever and wherever it is most convenient for them. They can interact with other students and instructor(s) at different times using the AKU-VLE.

3.4.3. **Bichronous Online Teaching**: This mode combines both asynchronous and synchronous modalities. In-person teaching is replaced by synchronous online teaching, where learners and faculty meet simultaneously (for example, via Zoom) but in different physical locations. In the

asynchronous components, learners engage with course content, activities, and each other and with faculty at different times (within a given timeframe).

3.5. **Online Teaching Approaches**:

3.5.1. **Blended Learning**: Blended learning is a systematic blend of in-person and online teaching, with online teaching comprising between 30% and 90% of the overall instruction. Online teaching can be synchronous, asynchronous, or bichronous. In blended courses, online teaching replaces in-person teaching. The blend, including the mix of in-person and online sessions, is pre-determined by the faculty member based on the course requirements (e.g., learning outcomes and competencies).

3.5.2. **Flipped Learning**: An instructional approach that combines in-person teaching with online learning activities at the pre-class or post-class stages to enhance the in-person learning experience. In the case of pre-class online tasks, students can engage with online materials before attending class, building a foundation of knowledge that is then reinforced through in-class activities. Post-class online tasks extend the learning beyond the classroom, allowing students to further explore and apply the concepts through asynchronous activities, e.g., threaded discussions, Wiki contributions, or quizzes. In this modality, online activities support/enhance the in-person teaching experience.

3.5.3. **Hybrid**: In hybrid courses, learners can remotely attend in-person teaching sessions through online technologies. In hybrid teaching, the institution determines students' participation modality.

3.5.4. **HyFlex:** In this approach, all sessions are offered in multiple formats, including in-person, synchronous online, and asynchronous online, to provide a flexible experience and accommodate various modes of participation. Students have the freedom to choose their preferred method of participation. They can flexibly adjust their participation modality throughout the course, whether on a weekly basis, by topic, or according to personal preference.

3.5.5. **Emergency Remote Teaching**: This approach was adopted during COVID-19 when a rapid shift to an alternative mode of delivery was made. It entailed using fully online or distance teaching methods for instruction that would typically be conducted face-to-face or in blended/hybrid formats. This temporary arrangement reverted to the original format once the crisis or emergency had subsided.

3.5.6. **Remote Teaching**: The course content is delivered as offline digital resources or printed materials in this approach. Phone calls and other forms of communication are used for interactions, such as to build connections between students and teachers.

3.5.7. **Self-paced online courses**: In self-paced online courses, students can complete course requirements at their own pace and preferred time and location. There is no in-person interaction with teachers or peers. Examples include Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which often have high dropout rates and require high self-motivation. This approach should, therefore, be used selectively, as interaction with teachers and peers is crucial for active and engaged learning. AKU emphasises the inclusion of opportunities for faculty-student interaction in all self-directed online courses.

3.6. **Artificial Intelligence (AI):** Systems that can process data and information in a way that resembles intelligent behaviour and typically include aspects of reasoning, learning, perception, prediction, planning or control (UNESCO, 2021).

3.6.1. **Generative Artificial Intelligence tools**: Generative AI is a type of AI that can generate text, images, and other content types based on the data they were trained on (Martineau, 2023).

Current examples of generative AI tools include ChatGPT, DALL-E, Bing AI, and Bard.

4. Programme

a. Course learning outcomes, assessments, and teaching materials must align with the chosen programme modality and meet the University's quality standards.

b. Academic units must ensure access to sufficient resources and support for effective online and blended teaching, including adherence to IT policies.

c. Before launching the programme, the academic unit must assess students' access to devices and the Internet to determine its viability.

d. Throughout the programme, students should be exposed to various digital pedagogies, recognising diverse skill sets, competencies, and capacity-building opportunities aligned with different modalities and learning needs. The aim of pedagogical richness should be to strike a balance in the learning pathways available and accessible to learners, enabling them to attain graduate attributes.

e. When selecting a modality or approach, consideration should be given to learners' needs, course objectives, and assessment requirements.

f. Prioritising asynchronous learning can offer flexibility to learners, promote social interaction, and allow for reflection and deep learning.

g. The AKU-VLE and print-based or offline digital resources can serve as a platform for asynchronous teaching.

h. Though there is no mandatory requirement for a lecture or tutorial to be held in person by the regulatory bodies, for clinical/lab work, faculty and students are required to be present in person.

i. Learner participation can be monitored through VLE logs and other learner analytics data focusing on learner engagement in discussion forums, submission of tasks, and contribution to online group activities. Faculty should use active learning strategies to ensure regular and active participation.

j. The University Support Service Readiness Checklist and Course and Programme Checklist outline important requirements and must be completed annually or at the time of programme approval, respectively.

5. Faculty

a. All academic units and support services must prioritise the professional development of faculty and staff involved in designing and implementing online and blended learning initiatives.

b. The Deans will ensure that faculty and staff members engaged in designing and teaching online courses receive sufficient training before undertaking such responsibilities.

c. Educational development support units at AKU, such as the Network of Quality, Teaching & Learning (QTL_net) and the Department for Educational Development (DED), will offer relevant courses.

d. The Faculty Readiness Self-Assessment checklist will help ensure that instructors are adequately prepared and equipped to teach effectively in a specific mode of instruction. The Programme Director must submit this checklist to the Registrar's Working Group (RWG) to confirm that instructors possess the requisite skills, knowledge, resources, and support to offer quality teaching in the selected modality.

6. Students

a. Students shall receive information regarding the programme's modality, requirements and expectations at the time of admission.

b. AKU recognises that not all students are prepared for the challenges and opportunities that teaching and learning in an online environment can present. Therefore, the Student Experience Office (SEO) will conduct a students' digital readiness assessment at the beginning of the academic year.

c. SEO will provide an appropriate orientation programme, along with other units (e.g., QTL_net, Library), to prepare students for relevant modalities.

d. Online learners shall be provided comprehensive support services, including academic advising, counselling, library resources, mental health services, and IT assistance on an ongoing basis. The relevant AKU units, such as Library, SEO, and ICT will provide these services.

e. To the extent possible, online learners shall have access to the same support services as on-campus students, including extra-curricular activities, ensuring equitable access to resources and assistance.

f. Learner Readiness Self-Assessment checklist can be used to evaluate and determine if students are adequately prepared and equipped to engage in online educational experiences effectively.

7. Technology

a. The <u>Virtual Learning Environment (AKU-VLE)</u> shall serve as AKU's LMS and be used to teach in various modalities.

b. The VLE and other online tools used for teaching and communication shall be regularly updated, secured, and monitored to ensure data privacy and prevent unauthorised access.

c. The ICT and purchase departments can facilitate staff and students' access to devices and connectivity by leveraging technology partnerships and collaborations.

d. The use of teaching software shall be governed by the global IT usage policy (e.g., no password sharing, ensuring GDPR compliance).

e. The University shall provide 24/7 access to the IT Help Desks for technical assistance.

f. The University shall ensure necessary hardware and connectivity provision for Hyflex teaching on campus.

8. Library

a. The University shall provide 24/7 access to digital library resources and seamless support for enquiries.

b. The library shall enable faculty and students to digitally access all required readings and reference materials.

c. The library shall provide information literacy training to faculty and students, where required.

d. The Library shall provide off-campus access to electronic resources through a Virtual Private Network (VPN) web application or client.

e. The library shall put a mechanism for enhancing academic integrity through systems such as TurnItIn.

9. Digital Learning Content Development

a. The University is committed to ensuring accessibility and inclusivity in online learning. Therefore, online courses and teaching materials shall be designed and delivered to accommodate diverse learning and accessibility needs.

b. Necessary provisions should be made to provide alternative formats for closed captions for videos, multiple languages, and other accommodations as necessary.

c. Standards of good practice should be followed in the design of online course content. Refer to the <u>AKU VLE based Course Website Review Checklist</u>.

10. Intellectual Property, Copyright and Privacy

a. Library shall provide a copyright clearance service for all online materials used in courses.

b. Faculty members designing and teaching online courses shall have the same ownership of the substantive and intellectual content of their courses that faculty have with any other modalities.

c. AKU will implement stringent access controls and authentication mechanisms to prevent unauthorised access to restricted course materials, assessments, or exams through the manipulation of URLs or exploitation of vulnerabilities in the VLE course websites.

11. Programme Monitoring and Evaluation

a. The monitoring and evaluations of online courses and programmes will be conducted using various data sources, including but not limited to student evaluations of teaching, faculty reflections, end-of-course reports, six-monthly reports, learning analytics, and assessment and completion data.

b. The University will actively promote the adoption of evidence-based practices in self-assessment reports to assess the effectiveness of online and blended programmes.

c. The programme leader will submit the following checklists along with relevant evidence to the RWG before the programme approval:

    a. <u>Checklist for University Support Service Readiness</u>: This readiness checklist will assist the University Academic Council in assessing the readiness of university academic support services to provide the necessary support for online and blended teaching and learning. This checklist should be completed biennially by the heads of each unit and submitted to the RWG by the Offices of the Regional Vice Provosts.

    b. <u>Course and Programme Checklist</u>: This checklist will assist academic programme directors in assessing the programme or course's readiness to be offered online or through blended approaches.

The Programme Directors should submit the completed checklist to the RWG before offering the programme.

d. All course outlines shall be developed using the "AKU Course Handbook Template Modified for Online and Blended Learning courses" (appendix C) and submitted to the RWG.

e. The programme leader will submit the "End of Semester (6-monthly) Progress Report" (appendix D) to the RWG.

12. Process of Online and Blended Programme and Course Approval

Approval of a new Online degree awarding programme:

a. The process outlined in policy #010, "Checklist for Submitting New Academic Programme Proposals to Academic Council", shall be followed.

b. All the necessary processes shall be followed within the academic unit for internal approval, including the Dean's approval.

c. The Programme Director shall develop the proposal and complete the relevant sections of the "Evidence-based Checklist for Online and Blended Course Design and Facilitation Readiness and Support."

d. The proposal, with the Dean's approval and checklists, shall be presented to the RWG by the Programme Director.

e. After RWG's approval, the programme proposal, checklist and RWG's recommendations shall be submitted to the Academic Council.

f. During the first time the programme is offered, regular six-monthly evidence-based progress reports shall be submitted to the RWG highlighting issues, challenges and mitigation strategies.

g. At the end of the programme a comprehensive review (self and peer) will be undertaken, and the evidence-based report will be submitted to the RWG.

Approval of courses being re-designed for online/blended teaching in existing on-campus programmes:

a. The faculty members will submit the course handbook and duly completed "Course and Programme Checklist" to the Programme Director.

b. All the necessary processes shall be followed within the academic unit for internal approval, including the Dean's approval.

c. After due endorsement from the Dean, the Programme Director shall submit the course handbook with the duly completed checklist to the RWG (policy 025) for the course to be approved, highlighting any areas in the checklist where requirements have not been met and the plans to address the gaps.

d. The course shall be offered after RWG's approval.

e. In subsequent offerings, Policy # 025: "Guidelines for Programme Curriculum Modifications" shall be applicable.

Appendix A: Regulatory Body Requirements

The regulatory bodies in the countries where Aga Khan University (AKU) operates set minimum quality standards for online and blended education, as summarized below:

PAKISTAN
In Pakistan, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) Online and Distance Learning (ODL) policy (2021) states that a university intending to provide online and distance education shall develop its own ODL policy and get it ratified by the relevant university bodies like the Syndicate and/or Senate. The modalities and formats of offering education may include, Asynchronous Learning, Synchronous Learning, Blended Learning, Distance Learning, E-Learning, Flipped Classroom, Hybrid Learning, and In-person Teaching. For Lab courses, the University shall provide evidence of the physical presence of the student and supervisor, which is required to provide a meaningful learning experience. The full and complete HEC online and distance learning (ODL) is available on the HEC website: Online and Distance Learning (ODL) policy (2021): Higher Education Commission, Pakistan. [Accessed on: February 23, 2023], available at: https://www.hec.gov.pk//english/policies/Pages/ODL.aspx

KENYA
The Commission of Universities Education (CUE), Kenya standards for Open, Distance and e-learning (ODEL) include modes of traditional distance education, E-Lerning provision and interactive CD ROMS, Blended learning and Virtual education. The document is available on the CUE website: Universities Standards and Guidelines (2014). Commission of Universities Education (CUE), Kenya. Accessed on: February 24, 2023, available at: https://www.cue.or.ke/index.php?option=com_phocadownload&view=category&id=16:standards-and-guidelines&Itemid=495

TANZANIA
The Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) Guidelines for Online and Blended Delivery of Courses provide guiding principles for the development, delivery and assessment of courses offered through online and/or blended modes in university institutions in Tanzania. The guidelines provide minimum parameters to be adhered to in the formulation and delivery of online courses. The online and blended delivery suggested formats include, asynchronous courses, blended learning, blended/hybrid courses, computer-supported learning, distance education courses, e-learning, face-to-face learning, massive open online courses, mobile learning, online courses, open educational resources, synchronous online courses and web-based learning. "Guidelines for Online and Blended Delivery Modes of Courses for University Institutions in Tanzania (2022). Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU), Tanzania." Accessed on: February 23, 2023, available at: https://www.tcu.go.tz/sites/default/files/Guidelines%20for%20Online%20and%20Blended%20delivery%20of%20courses%20-%20Final.pdf

UGANDA
The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), Uganda provides minimum standards for open distance and e-learning programmes. The document provides the benchmark standards for all aspects of learning under ODeL: traditional distance education, E-learning provision and interactive CD ROMs, blended learning and virtual learning. "Minimum Standards for Open Distance and E-Learning Programmes (2019). National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), Uganda." Accessed on: February 27, 2023, available at: https://unche.or.ug/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/ODeL-Minimum-Standards_Final_2019.pdf

Appendix B: Evidence Based Checklists for Online and Blended Course Design and Facilitation Readiness and Support

This section provides checklists for online and blended Course Design and Facilitation Readiness and Support as a part of the quality assurance process.

Checklist for University Support Service Readiness: This readiness checklist will assist the University Academic Council in assessing the readiness of university academic support services to provide the necessary support for online and blended teaching and learning. This checklist should be completed biennially by the heads of each unit and submitted to the Registrar's Working Group (RWG) by the Office of the Regional Vice Provosts.

Course and Programme Checklist: This checklist will assist academic Programme Directors in assessing the programme or course's readiness to be offered through online or blended learning approaches. The Programme Director should submit the completed checklist to the RWG at the time of approval (before offering the programme).

Faculty Readiness Self-Assessment: This checklist will help ensure that instructors are adequately prepared and equipped to teach in a particular mode of instruction effectively. This checklist shall be submitted to RWG by the Programme Director to confirm that instructors possess the necessary skills, knowledge, resources, and support to deliver quality instruction.

Learner Readiness Self-Assessment: This checklist can be used to evaluate and determine if students are adequately prepared and equipped to engage in online educational experiences effectively.

AKU VLE based Course Website Review Checklist: The checklist is based on good practice guidelines and aims to ensure that the online learning environment meets evidence-based good practices. The instructors are encouraged to complete the checklist as a self-assessment to review the quality of the course website on the VLE. They should seek support from the Blended and Digital Learning and/or IT- Academic Computing team to address the gaps and enhance the quality of the course.

PART I- Checklist for University Support Service Readiness

This readiness checklist will assist the University Academic Council in assessing the readiness of university academic support services to provide the necessary support for online and blended teaching and learning. This checklist should be completed biennially by the heads of each unit and submitted to the Registrar's Working Group (RWG) by the Office of the Regional Vice Provosts.

Following are the instructions to complete the checklist:
- a. Each indicator is to be filled out by a specific support service head. The relevant support service unit is mentioned at the top of each table.
- b. The Regional Vice Provosts will provide overall sign-off and any comments for RWG's consideration.
- c. The status of each indicator is to be provided as Y = Yes/Completed, N = Not completed, IP = In progress.
- d. For each indicator, please provide the evidence supporting the item.

Regional Vice Provost Signature: Date:	Comments by Regional Vice Provost:
RWG Chair Signature and Date:	Comments by RWG Chair:

Registrar's Working Group

       Date of completion: _____

       Contact person: _____

Readiness Indicator	Status (Y/N/IP)	Evidence
A governing body has been established to authorize online and blended learning programmes and courses and adjudicate complaints.		
A policy outlining the institution's position on online and blended learning and readiness guidelines is in place and is regualy updated.		

Regional Vice Provosts

  Date of completion: _____
  Contact person: _____

Readiness Indicator	Status (Y/N/IP)	Evidence
MOUs have been signed with AKDN and other agencies to provide AKU students with access to computer and Internet facilities in off-campus locations.		

QTL_net

  Date of completion: _____
  Contact person: _____

Readiness Indicator	Status (Y/N/IP)	Evidence
Robust faculty development programmes and support services are available, encompassing online and blended course design, teaching and assessment strategies, and the effective use of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and other tools (including AI).		

Library

  Date of completion: _____
  Contact person: _____

Readiness Indicator	Status (Y/N/IP)	Evidence
Both on-campus and off-campus students have online access to library resources, including required readings and course materials.		

Readiness Indicator	Status (Y/N/IP)	Evidence
Clear guidelines for digital library access are disseminated, catering to various devices.		
Programmes are offered to enhance the information literacy skills of both faculty and students, equipping them with the ability to find, retrieve, analyze, and properly use information.		

Digital Scholarship Center (AV)

Date of completion: _____

Contact person: _____

Readiness Indicator	Status (Y/N/IP)	Evidence
Relevant support and resources are provided to faculty members for creating digital media learning content, including interactive modules, videos, simulations, and animations.		

Information Technology

Date of completion: _____

Contact person: _____

Readiness Indicator	Status (Y/N/IP)	Evidence
The university provides a functional, effective, and operational Learning Management System (LMS) and other online teaching and learning tools.		
The VLE system is designed to be as fail-safe as possible, ensuring secure data storage and regular backups for courses.		
All policies and procedures align with ethical norms and government policies related to data protection and the privacy of both student and faculty data generated through online learning.		

Faculty and staff members have access to suitable devices and hardware necessary for offering online and blended learning courses.		
Adequate and reliable internet connectivity is available to all students, faculty, and staff members on the campus, ensuring uninterrupted access to online resources.		
A 24/7 IT Helpdesk service is accessible to all faculty, staff, and students, offering timely and relevant assistance for troubleshooting any technical issues.		
Faculty and staff involved in online and blended teaching have access to the Internet from off-campus locations as needed to support online teaching responsibilities.		

PART II- Course and Programme Checklist

This checklist will assist academic Programme Directors in assessing the programme or course's readiness to be offered through online or blended approaches. The Programme Directors should submit the completed checklist to the RWG before offering the programme.

Following are the instructions to complete the checklist:
I.   The checklist is divided into two sections.
II.   The first section is to be filled out by each Course Coordinator/leader/director.
III. The second section is to be filled out by the Programme Director.
IV.   The status of each indicator is to be provided as Y = Yes/Completed, N = Not completed, IP = In progress.
V.   For each indicator, please provide "Evidence."

Course Name (with Course handbook attached):	Name of the programme:
Name of the Course leader:	Date:
Programme Director Signature and Date:	Academic Unit:
Department Chair/Associate Dean Signature and Date:	Dean Signature and Date:
RWG Chair Signature and Date	RWG Comments:

Course Readiness Indicator	Status (Y/N/IP)	Evidence
The course is accessible on the AKU VLE.		
The course outline template has been uploaded on the VLE.		
Faculty members teaching the course have updated their profiles on the VLE.		
The course modality, content, and strategies are aligned with the course's learning outcomes.		
The assessment strategies are aligned with both the learning outcomes and the modality.		
Any components of the course that cannot be taught online, such as clinical rotations or practicum, have been appropriately addressed.		
Faculty members teaching the course are aware of students' needs, as determined through the learner readiness assessment survey.		
The online and blended teaching approaches used in the course are aligned with the identified student readiness and needs.		
The external digital materials used in the course have been cleared for copyright by the AKU copyright office.		
Detailed information on the assessment methods and criteria is included in the course handbook.		
Online formative assessment strategies have been included to ensure that assessments are designed to facilitate and enhance the learning process.		
Student learning hours have been calculated using "time-on-task" measure.		
A single synchronous session is of a maximum of 2 hours with a break in between.		
Student: Teacher ratio is appropriate for the course modality and pedagogy and will not affect student learning.		
The faculty have availed of professional development to use the tools and approaches to ensure learner engagement.		
Learner access and online learning needs have been carefully considered during the development of online and blended learning materials and activities.		
Course Website meets the quality criteria (See Course website Review Checklist).		

Section 2: To be filled out by Programme Director

Programme Readiness Indicator	Status	Evidence
The programme or course design follows the principles of good practice. (AKU VLE based Course Website Review Checklist)		
A comprehensive learner readiness assessment has been conducted to gather information on learner demographics, geographic locations, digital and online learning competencies, and access to hardware, software, and internet connectivity.		
The readiness assessment demonstrates that a significant majority of students (75% or above) have the required digital and information literacies, including proficiency in computer operations, use of productivity software, email usage, multimedia utilization (e.g., videos), and a range of internet knowledge and online tool usage ensuring they are adequately prepared for online learning. (See Learner Readiness Self-Assessment)		
Learner access and online learning needs have been carefully considered during the development of online and blended learning materials and activities.		
Students have been informed about the device and internet access requirements for the programme at the time of admission, and alternatives are proposed for those without access to appropriate technology.		
Online students enrolled in the programme have access to the necessary hardware, software, and reliable internet connectivity at their homes.		
An orientation programme for students has been planned, which includes an overview of courses, teaching and assessment information, expectations, plagiarism guidelines, online/remote study skills, and information literacy skills. This orientation is planned to be conducted before the courses begin to help students become self-directed learners.		
Faculty members are confident in using online tools and pedagogies for teaching, learning, and assessment. (See Faculty Readiness Self-Assessment)		

Faculty members have undergone appropriate training related to online and blended learning methodologies, and assessment strategies. These courses are offered by QTL_net and other educational development units.		
Faculty members have prior experience in online and blended instruction.		
Faculty members teaching online course or programme have access to assistance from VLE assistants, QTL_net and Digital Scholarship Center, to effectively design and teach online or blended courses.		
Those teaching online for the first time will be mentored by experienced faculty members.		
Faculty and staff involved in online and blended teaching have access to the Internet from off-campus locations as needed to support online teaching responsibilities.		
For new courses, a dry run has been planned to identify and resolve any unforeseen issues before the official launch.		
A feedback mechanism has been established to receive and respond to learner concerns related to online and blended teaching and learning. Email and other contact information are share on the VLE.		
All students will receive their AKU login credentials before the course start date to access the online learning materials.		
Special needs of students, including those with learning disabilities and mental health concerns, have been identified, and strategies have been developed to support these students in online courses.		
The IT is aware of the specific technical needs for each course and has provided a plan to offer timely and relevant technical support to both faculty and online/remote students.		
The library has been informed about the specific needs of the online programme and has developed and shared the necessary resources and information to support students and faculty effectively.		
All course materials have been cleared through copyright office.		

Faculty Readiness Self-Assessment

This checklist will help ensure that instructors are adequately prepared and equipped to effectively teach in a particular mode of instruction. This checklist shall be used as a self-assessment tool by the Programme Director to assess and confirm that instructors possess the necessary skills, knowledge, resources, and support to deliver quality instruction.

1. Name
2. Designation
3. Have you taught online or blended course(s)? [Yes] [No]
4. Have you received any training on designing and/or teaching an online or blended course? [Yes] [No]
5. Are you familiar with the following?

	Yes	No
AKU Teaching Learning Framework		
AKU Graduate Attributes		

6. Use the statements below to assess your Technical Competencies:

	Don't have this ability	Not very confident	Moderately confident	Quite confident	Totally confident
Navigate the course site in the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).					
Enroll students in my course site on the VLE.					
Create Discussion Forums in the course site.					
Upload course materials (resources) to the VLE in different formats: text, video, etc.					
Create and manage a variety of activities on the VLE (e.g., Wikis, Feedback, Glossary).					
Integrate other tools (e.g., Padlet, Kahoot) into my course site.					
Create groups in the VLE.					
Apply different course formats.					
Set up the class grade book on the VLE.					

Manage learner assignment submissions in the VLE.					
Create badges.					
Enable Turnitin plagiarism plugin settings to check for plagiarism in submitted assignments.					
Create a Quiz on my course site.					
Add blocks to my course website.					
Create and edit videos using Panopto.					
Access activity reports.					

7. Use the statements below to assess your Pedagogical Competencies:

	Don't have this ability	Not very confident	Moderately confident	Quite confident	Totally confident
Write SMART learning outcomes.					
Create assessments (formative, summative, authentic, for/of/as learning) that are aligned with the learning outcomes.					
Plan a session that uses active learning strategies.					
Write clear instructions for the activities I design in the VLE.					
Adhere to copyright standards when designing course content.					
Design and facilitate VLE based activities to establish teacher presence in the course.					
Organize instructional materials into modules or units in the VLE.					
Continuously monitor learner progress by using course statistics or reports.					
Provide detailed feedback on assignments in the VLE.					
Attend to the unique challenges of online learning where learners are separated by time and geographic proximity.					
Use different teaching methods in the online environment (e.g., brainstorming, collaborative activities, discussions, presentations)					
Moderate online discussion activities to foster students' exchange of ideas and learning.					

Learner Readiness Self-Assessment

This checklist can be used to evaluate and determine if students are adequately prepared and equipped to engage in online educational experiences effectively.

	Readiness Indicator	Never	Hardly ever	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
Technological competencies and access	I consider myself proficient in using a computer.					
	I can use computers for Word processing.					
	I can use computer for developing presentations.					
	I can use search engines to find or gather information for online learning.					
	I can use AI tools for learning purposes.					
Self Directed Learning	I am able to set goals and deadlines for myself.					
	I seek assistance when facing learning problems.					
	I am someone who is self-disciplined and can get things done on time.					
	I am capable of learning new skills for an online course.					
	I am able to work independently.					
Communication and social competencies	I initiate and/or maintain social interaction with peers using online tools.					

	I use online tools (e.g., videos, voice notes) to effectively communicate with others.					
	I use text-based online tools (e.g., email, blogs) to effectively communicate with others.					
	I post questions or initiate a conversation in online discussions.					
	I am able to respond to criticism and conflict in an online environment.					
	I am able to establish and maintain a respectful relationship with my instructor in an online course (e.g., ask questions, express my opinions).					
	I timely inform the instructor when unexpected situations arise.					
Learner Characteristics (motivation, time)	I have higher expectations for my learning performance.					
	I have a sense of self-confidence in using computer technologies for specific tasks.					
	I get distracted by other online activities when learning online (instant messages, Internet surfing).					
	I am motivated to get more involved in learning activities when using computer technologies.					
	I am able to dedicate the required hours per week for an online course.					
	I am convinced that I will get the same value of education from an online course.					

AKU VLE based Course Website Review Checklist

The checklist is aimed at ensuring the online learning environment meets the evidence-based good practices. The checklist has been developed based on the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education by Chickering and Gamson (1991). These are:

1. encourages contact between students and faculty
2. develops reciprocity and cooperation among students
3. encourages active learning
4. gives prompt feedback
5. emphasizes time on task
6. communicates high expectations
7. respects diverse talents and ways of learning

Process: The faculty member and the course designer should complete the checklist for self-assessment before the course starts. The faculty should review the results and discuss them with the course design team. Relevant changes should be made, and final report should be shared with the Programme Director.

Name of the reviewer	
Name of the course	
Course website URL	
Date of review	

Statements	Does not meet the standard	Partially meets the standard	Meets the standard	Exceeds the standard
Orientation of the virtual learning space				

A welcome message has been provided along with an overarching description of the course.				
Expectations for successful completion of the course are clearly and concisely provided.				
Detailed information about how to navigate the course has been provided.				
Course tabs, discussion forums, assignments, and assessments are clearly laid out and easy to locate.				
Faculty's contact information (name, e-mail, phone/Skype, office hours, etc.) is written clearly on the course web site.				
Steps have been mentioned on the course website for students to seek help/advice from faculty both in and outside of class (e.g., online).				
The faculty's online and in-person office hours are stated on the course website.				
Faculty's response time to learner e-mail messages is mentioned (e.g., all emails will be answered within 48 hours working days) on the course website.				
The timeline for receiving feedback on assignments is clearly mentioned on the course website.				
Information about seeking help from the IT and learner support team is clearly stated on the course website.				
The course website provides links to the online study skills module.				
Students are required to post their contact information online so they may communicate with each other early on in the course.				
Links to approved course outlines, syllabus, assessment briefs, and weekly timelines with due dates and weighting of assessments clearly identified and active.				
Copyrights, Privacy and Security of Information*				
Steps have been taken to protect students' educational records/privacy rights (e.g., course website on the VLE is a password protected)				
Course materials contain statements clarifying ownership and usage rights where appropriate.				

System is in place to maintain a backup of content (videos, reading material, SCORM packages) offline.				
All quoted materials are cited correctly by adhering to one of the standard citation formats.				
Interactive online content and activities				
Icebreakers and online socialization activities are introduced early in the course (e.g., during the first week).				
The design of the modules prompts the students and faculty interaction (e.g., at least one out of three online discussions are moderated by the faculty).				
Online activities promote learner-learner interaction and collaboration (e.g., use of discussion forum, wikis, google docs etc. for group projects, cooperative learning).				
All instructional materials used in the course are relevant, up to date, and free from spelling and grammar errors.				
All links to external materials are live and active.				
There is a dedicated space (for example, discussion forums) for frequently asked questions, course feedback, and reflection (for example, informal surveys).				
Online activities are used to encourage students to discuss difficult ideas associated with the course content with their peers in the course.				
Expectations regarding learner participation in the online discussion forum are clearly mentioned (e.g., students are expected to respond to comments/questions/ critique that are posted by other students at least once).				
For online collaborative assignments, rubrics include collaboration and use of technology as one of the assessment criteria.				
Students' initial knowledge about the use of relevant ICTs is assessed within the first week of starting the course and/or module.				
The faculty's role in reminding/ encouraging students when they do not complete the tasks on time is clearly articulated.				

The importance of scheduling/using time wisely is emphasized during the orientation week/module.				
A schedule of timelines is provided to clearly guide students by when events and learning activities should be accomplished.				
The orientation week plan covers information on support to prepare students for blended learning experience (e.g., ICT literacy, online learning).				
Assessment values analytical responses to activities on the website (e.g., forum, wikis etc.)				
Usability and accessibility				
The purpose of each online activity is clearly stated.				
The instructions for completion of online activities are clearly mentioned.				
All web links and embedded media elements work well.				
The online quizzes work well.				
The amount of time it would take to complete the online learning activities is clearly stated.				
Indicators and detailed descriptors on how assignments would be graded (a rubric) are provided.				
Instructions on how to submit assessment tasks are clearly written.				
Guidelines on how to use the online tools are clearly provided				
Prerequisite technology skills are explicitly stated.				
Options are provided for delivering information through multiple means.				
Multimedia and interface design				
The online activities comprise a variety of activity types (e.g., podcasts, online discussions, virtual labs, WebQuests, digital stories, etc.) to cater to the different learning needs, interests, or backgrounds of the students.				
The course content comprises a variety of media types (audio, video, texts etc.) to cater to the different needs, interests, or backgrounds of the students.				
The media used in the course is relevant.				

The online interface design has a clear and logical layout of content.				
The design elements (color, font type/size, placement of icons, etc.) demonstrate sensitivity to readability and accessibility issues.				
Course architecture permits tutors to add content, activities, and assessments to extend learning opportunities.				
The course website is constructed with technical standards allowing sharing of content and assessments among different learning management systems / virtual learning environments.				
User interface design is consistent throughout the course site and follows best practices of accessibility and user experience.				

If you were to change something about this course website, it would be:

_____

_____

_____

Other Comments:

_____
_____
_____
_____

*Refer to Information Classifications and Handling Policy https://one.aku.edu/it/Documents/Policy%20Documents/ADM-P-003%20(information%20classification%20&%20Handling).PDF

Appendix C: AKU Course Handbook Template[1]

Course title:	*as approved by the academic council*
Course number:	
Programme:	
Semester or Term offered:	
Course status:	*Core/Elective/Specialisation*
Credit points:	
Prerequisite:	
Co-requisite:	
Mode of study:	In-person Blended (? % in-person or synchronous online **+** ? % asynchronous online) Online (? % synchronous online **+** ? % asynchronous online) Self-paced
VLE Course website URL	
Student Time commitment	• Synchronous online learning • Asynchronous online learning • Independent learning • In-person teaching
Faculty* name & Contact information:	
Team supporting faculty	

* Faculty trained for online and blended learning

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1. **Course Description:**

2. **Aim of the Course:**

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[1] Modified for Online and Blended learning courses

3. Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the course, participants will be able to:

- .
- .

4. Course Themes or Topics:

5. Weekly Course Schedule:

Date/session details	Theme / Topic	Modality
Week 01 **Month, Date, year** **(Facilitator)**		**In-person Asynchronous via VLE Synchronous via Zoom**
Week 02 **Month, Date, year** **(Facilitator)**		**In-person Asynchronous via VLE Synchronous via Zoom**

6. Course Structure and Teaching Approaches *(including details of online synchronous and asynchronous learning approaches, other technologies to be used and how the VLE will be used*)**:**

7. Course Assessment Tasks:
   a. **Task 1** *(Marks allocated; modality; alignment with Learning Outcomes)*
      i. **Assessment Rubric**

   b. **Task 2** *(Marks allocated; modality; alignment with Learning Outcomes)*
      i. **Assessment Rubric**

8. Essential Readings:

9. Suggested Readings:

10. **AI use statement:** *(Refer to the AKU AI usage guidelines)*

Appendix D: End of semester (6-monthly) Progress Report

Programme Name:

Semester and Year

Name of the Programme Director:

Dean's Signature:

Date Report Submission:

I. Executive Summary: (max 500 words)
Provide a brief overview of the programme, its objectives, and key semester progress highlights.

II. Programme Overview: (max 250 words)
A. List the programme's main courses and outcomes offered during the semester.
B. Briefly describe the relevance and importance of these courses/outcomes.

III. Key Achievements: (max 500 words)
A. Summarize the major accomplishments and milestones achieved during the semester.
B. Highlight any noteworthy student or faculty achievements specific to the modality.

IV. Assessment: (max 300 words)
A. Include data on student performance, feedback, and any relevant metrics.
B. Analyze the assessment results during the semester and discuss areas of improvement.
C. Analyze student performance on online assessment strategies

V. Curriculum and Pedagogy: (max 300 words)
A. Provide an overview of the curriculum and online instructional strategies used during the semester.
B. Highlight any additional changes or enhancements made to the curriculum during the semester and why.

VI. Student Engagement: (max 300 words)
A. Discuss student online participation and engagement within the programme.

B. Share examples of student projects, initiatives, or research activities in online/blended modality.

C. Include data on attendance, student surveys, or other engagement metrics (e.g., VLE analytics).

VII. Challenges and Solutions: (max 250 words)

A. Identify any challenges encountered during the semester.

B. Describe the strategies and solutions implemented to address these challenges.

VIII. Future Plans: (max 500 words)

A. Outline the programme's goals and objectives for the next semester.

B. Explain any changes or improvements planned for the programme.

C. Share how you intend to build on the successes of the current semester.

D. Highlight areas where additional resources or support may be needed.

IX. Conclusion:

Summarise key lessons.

X. Evidence (if applicable):

A. Include any charts, graphs, or data tables that support the information presented in the report.

B. Append any additional documentation, such as student feedback surveys or assessment rubrics.

C. Refer to the data sources that are accessible in reports within the VLE course.