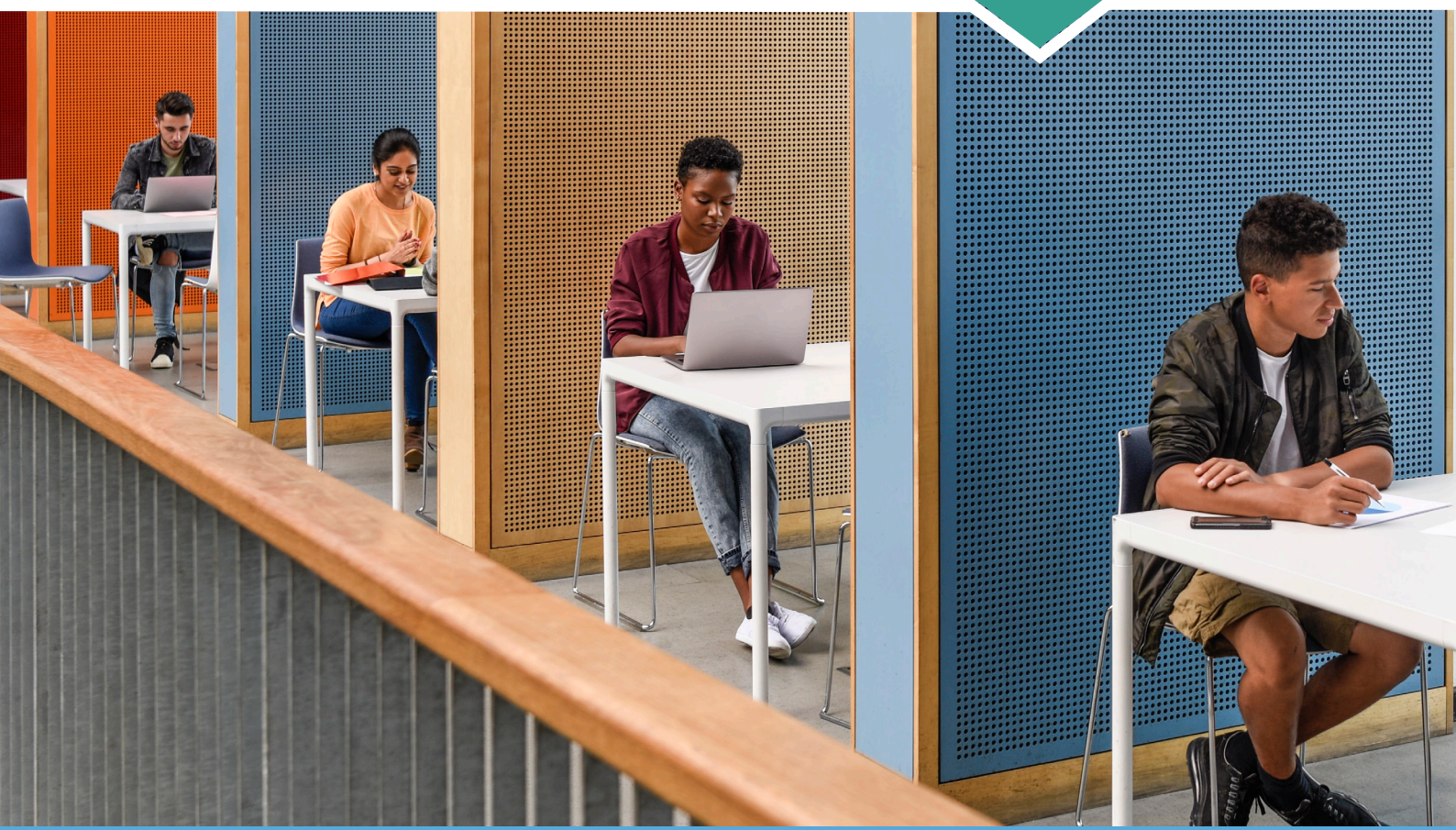
QAA

Guidance

Building a Taxonomy for Digital Learning



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Introduction

Since March 2020, when QAA published its initial guidance on maintaining quality and standards in the crisis, through to a series of thematic guidance and supporting resources, our intention has been to support the sector in developing solutions to the unique demands that the COVID-19 scenario has placed on providers and the sector at large. QAA is now beginning to look beyond the immediate crisis, to develop guidance with the sector and support providers in planning for 2020-21 and beyond. Our first publication in this third stage of guidance - Preserving Quality and Standards Through a Time of Rapid Change: UK Higher Education in 2020-21 - was published on 2 June 2020.

In developing this paper, we have continued our approach of engaging directly with providers and it is the result of a series of conversations that we have undertaken with senior colleagues from a broad range of institutions. As a result of COVID-19, most providers have had to pivot quickly to a greater use of digital approaches to delivery. It was clear in these discussions that the different approaches, and for some the speed of their adoption, have highlighted the variety and disparate use of terminology used to describe the digital learning experience on offer across the sector. The challenge for providers is, therefore, how to effectively communicate and describe what they will be offering their students in 2020-21 (and beyond) and how they will ensure the quality of this provision.

By producing this document, QAA aims to help UK higher education providers build a common language to describe digital approaches to programme delivery and support them in setting students' expectations of their programmes. It looks to define some of the most common terms that providers use to describe the ways in which they and their students engage with digital teaching and learning. It also seeks to go further and provide broad classifications of the type of experience a student can expect when engaging with education and training programmes that include digital elements ranging from 'passive' to 'immersive' digital engagement and experiences.

QAA does not intend this document to set out any regulatory requirement for digital approaches to learning and teaching. Instead, it is designed to support providers to develop their ways of talking about digital methods of delivery, articulating what students can expect and therefore better assure themselves that quality and standards are being maintained. It is intended to be a starting point for a wider conversation about how providers can talk to themselves, each other and students about these differing methods of delivery, in more consistent, more easily understood, ways. Following this, QAA will further engage with its members in order to determine how a common approach to this terminology can be embedded across the sector and will be looking to work with sector agencies in seeking to adopt consistent terminologies of digital provision.

Section 1: Building an understanding of common terms

While developing this paper, it became apparent that definitions pertaining to digital education are being used fluidly, often changing depending on context and the audience. It was also clear that this spectrum of description, when talking about an aspect of digital education, was not simply different when comparing providers' approaches. Often one term may be used by staff at a provider when talking to colleagues, a different term (for the same thing) was used when communicating to colleagues outside of their institutions, and a third term used when they were communicating with students. The use of these terms may also have been influenced by organisational policy, the recent proliferation of regulatory or sector guidance, influential individuals or because of a dislike of other terms relating to the same thing.

In attempting to move towards a common way to describe how students may engage with digital education, QAA have discussed the diversity of terms that are being used by providers to explain what they are offering, and what they plan to offer in the future. The most common of these we have captured in our glossary table (in section 3). However, there are some commonly used umbrella terms that required more discussion than a simple definition. The terms in this section are often used interchangeably but carry with them connotations, inferences and historical context that are not immediately obvious and can influence people's understanding of an approach to learning. Providers are using them to help communicate the different opportunities for learning that they are developing. But the differing uses of these terms may lead to misunderstandings and suggest to some students that less desirable opportunities are being described.

Online, virtual or digital learning?

The term *online* works well as an umbrella term as it is in common use beyond the UK higher education sector; it focuses on the connectivity of the learning, teaching and support delivery methods that may be employed by a provider. However, it carries with it the connotations that all the learning may be web-based, requiring students to use a connected device in order to access any of the learning, teaching and support activities that are on offer. There is also the suggestion that *online* can be considered as happening at a physical distance from a provider, when students could be detached from onsite classroom learning. *Online* is also linked to convenience and a lack of engagement with what may previously have been a physical, in-person experience (for example, online shopping). Due to these connotations, *online* may be viewed as a less desirable option for those students who want a greater degree of social interaction or to physically engage with teaching, learning and support activities. *Online learning* may also be seen as a less desirable option for those students who have limited access to stable internet access or no access to appropriate devices on which to interact with their learning.

The term *virtual* is less widely used in higher education but is again understood beyond the sector. It avoids issues suffered by *online* as it is not inextricably linked with being web-based and therefore does not have the same connotations of being delivered at a distance from a provider. *Virtual* often does not denote convenience, instead suggesting that the level of engagement required compared to a physical experience will be similar but different. This difference to the physical, real experience, however, is one of the implications of its use. Some can feel that *virtual* is linked to artificial, inauthentic, or simply not 'real' experiences. As such, some providers only refer to virtual learning in a context where virtual reality technology is involved, to avoid any implication of inauthenticity. Due to these connotations, *virtual* may be viewed as a less desirable option for those students who want to experience an authentic, 'real', higher education experience.

The term *digital* is an umbrella term that is increasing in use in the higher education sector. It is inextricably linked to the storage of data but has developed as a term to mean involving or relating to the use of computer technology, exemplified by the use of the terms *digital skills* or *digital literacy*. When compared to analogue, it also has positive connotations for some as it suggests that things have developed compared to more traditional ways of doing things. It is widely understood that *digital* information can be accessed offline and it can be engaged with in a variety of situations (onsite, or offsite, in-person or remotely). *Digital* ways of working are still linked to the storage and use of information, so it also does not carry with it any suggestion of being inauthentic. Therefore, *digital* does not seem to have the same connotations as *online* or *virtual* and instead seems to be a more neutral term. Its use, therefore, could give providers a greater opportunity to go further than just using the term and articulate what a *digital learning* approach would look like for their students.

Blended or hybrid learning?

Blended learning and *hybrid learning* are terms that are used interchangeably by providers when describing different models of delivery which use a mix of methods to engage students in learning. *Blended* is the more commonly used term of the two and is applied in several different ways to describe different models of delivery and/or student engagement. *Hybrid* is not as prevalent in the UK higher education sector. Providers use both to describe students' engagement with learning that takes place partly in a digital environment (either onsite or remotely) and partly in-person, onsite.

The proportions of the different types of engagement can vary considerably from programme to programme and can refer to individual modules or the whole programme being a mix of approaches. However, as *blended* has historically been the most prevalent, there is a greater variety of models of delivery to which this term has been associated. Some institutions use the term blended, particularly internally, as a generic term for provision that includes any element of digital learning. *Blended* is also associated with models of delivery which require students to engage with timetabled onsite learning activities across the academic year, in addition to engaging with digital learning activities between these times. It is also used where there is not a requirement for regular onsite attendance, but there may be options for students to attend in person should they choose (for example, residential study weekends).

While *hybrid learning* is not as prevalent, it has begun to be used by some providers to describe programmes designed to provide students with a greater degree of choice as to how they engage with their learning. Where this is the case, programmes have been designed to be delivered both onsite and remotely, allowing students to move between the two methods of delivery seamlessly. Students are therefore given agency to construct their own ways of engaging with these *hybrid* programmes, defining how much they want to engage with the onsite or digital learning activities. However, while there may be some differences in the connotations between the two terms, we have not found any fundamental difference in what they describe. Therefore, providers should always ensure that there is clarity in any communication they have with students when using *blended* or *hybrid* to describe the methods of delivery of their programmes. Given the breadth of different models these terms are used to describe, further information will always be needed to avoid any potential misunderstandings about what students should expect from their learning.

Distance or remote learning?

Distance learning and *remote learning* are terms that are used interchangeably by providers when describing teaching and learning activities. Both describe a method of delivery which involve activities that happen away from the physical site of a provider with students using

digital means to engage with a programme, rather than having any requirement to visit the provider. However, both terms have connotations leading to some providers clearly favouring one over the other as they seek to clearly articulate what they are offering their students.

Distance learning is a term that was in use before the widespread proliferation of digital approaches to learning and was initially related to courses delivered by correspondence. As with *face-to-face learning*, this term has its root in the communication style that students adopted to engage with members of staff responsible for delivering the programme by distance. This connotation has led some providers to use the term *remote learning* in its place to, in their opinion, better describe the physical location of a student and not carry any suggestion as to how students will be communicating with staff. However, *remote learning* is treated with caution by other providers as it is seen to classify this method of delivery as removed from the rest of a providers' programmes and from the provider itself.

The difference in the connotations between the two terms means that there are small differences, but we have not found any fundamental difference in what they describe. Instead, we have found that the circumstances in which a provider finds itself have tended to be the driving force between the use of one term or the other. For instance, *distance learning* has been used by some providers to pitch their programmes towards clearly-defined cohorts of potential students, while other providers have found that this term can be viewed negatively when being looked at in an international context. We have also found at least one provider using both to articulate differences in the programmes they offer with *distance learning* being used to describe existing programmes and *remote learning* being used to refer to those programmes that have pivoted to digital delivery during the COVID-19 situation.

Face-to-face, in-person, on campus or onsite delivery?

Face-to-face delivery of education and training programmes has been in common use for some time in the higher education sector. It has most often been used to describe an approach where the delivery of a programme happens at a provider with a staff member delivering learning and teaching directly to students. Its meaning is inextricably linked to communication styles and previously allowed a clear distinction to be made between communication in which individuals could see each other (such as a tutorial) and when they could not (such as a phone conversation). Given this, the use of the term *face-to-face* was used to denote if communication (and therefore delivery of some teaching and learning) was taking place *in person* or if it was taking place remotely. However, with the proliferation of videoconferencing, *face-to-face* communication can now take place when individuals are physically close or remote, given that individuals can see each other even if they are at a distance.

In-person delivery of education and training programmes is a term that is not as widely used as *face-to-face* but is being employed by providers to outline how students will be expected to engage with teaching and learning activities. As it describes the physical position of the person who will be participating in the activities, it avoids any potential misunderstanding (regarding where students and staff will be located) that may arise when talking about *face-to-face* delivery. However, as with *face-to-face,* while *in-person* delivery may be appropriately used to describe how part of a programme is being delivered, usually it is not used to describe the delivery of a programme in its entirety.

The term *on campus* has the same benefit as *in person* as it clearly articulates where the learning and teaching activities of a programme will take place, rather than how students and staff will communicate during these activities. It is a term that can also be used to describe

how a whole programme will be delivered. This means that it can be used to avoid misunderstandings when certain parts of teaching and learning are directed by staff, but not delivered by them, *in person.* However, *on campus* is most appropriate for providers that have campus-based sites of delivery. For those providers who do not have a campus, or for those who have delivery sites outside of a main campus, *onsite delivery* is more appropriate. As a term, it is not as widely recognised as the others, but when used appropriately, may ensure that there are fewer misunderstandings when communicating a type of delivery to students.

Social or physical distancing?

Social distancing is terminology used by UK governments to describe the requirement for individuals to maintain a safe distance to avoid catching or spreading coronavirus. While social distancing is the phrase in most common use in health advice, the connotation of social distance has impacts for learning and teaching. Learning is, at least in part, a social experience and that collaboration and the formation of social learning networks should still be possible and are very much to be encouraged, even if students are not onsite together. Using the term social distancing, therefore, may create a perception that there is a greater distancing required than just the physical space between two people.

Physical distancing, similarly, describes the requirement for individuals to maintain a safe distance from one another. It is not yet as common in its usage as *social distancing* but is becoming more recognised within higher education and more widely used. *Physical distancing* also does not suffer the same connotation as *social distancing* as it limits the perception of the distancing to the physical space. This frees it from any suggestion that staff or students should distance socially as well as physically.

In the classifications set out below, you should be able to see how we have attempted to use some of these terms in a consistent way to articulate the types of experiences a student may have when engaging with different types of digital learning.

Section 2: Building a taxonomy of students' digital experience

Through defining the terms above and in creating the glossary, it is clear that, currently, there is no easily understood way in which different approaches to digital learning can be compared. Therefore, providers have understandably struggled to ensure that applicants are clear about what they should expect from the digital education on offer, and how this compares to other programmes. This can hinder prospective students' ability to make informed choices about the programmes to which they would like to apply. In an attempt to help ameliorate this situation, we have developed broad classifications of digital learning.

Classifying the methods of delivering digital learning and teaching activities is, as demonstrated above, fraught with challenges given the connotations of some umbrella terms and the similarity of others. As providers use terms most appropriate to their context, cohorts and programmes, it was felt that any classification system that focused on methods of delivery would, inevitably, be suitable only for a proportion of providers. Therefore, the focus of this classification is on how providers intend their students to engage with digital learning activities, rather than trying to classify the approaches themselves. In classifying the type of engagement that students can expect, we hope that providers may be better able to help students clearly understand and compare different approaches.

This classification does not make any judgement about the quality of learning experience that students will have. Instead, it attempts to categorise and describe the different student experiences depending on the type and volume of any digital engagement. In formulating these classifications, we have taken into account students' engagement with digital resources, physical location, technology, software, each other and support services. We accept that in practice, there is a spectrum of experiences between the students having little or no digital teaching or learning and having a fully immersive experience where all the teaching and learning is delivered digitally, which do not fit neatly into these five categories.

Passive digital engagement/experience

Where little or no aspect of the learning and teaching activity on offer is designed to be delivered digitally. Students will not experience any digital aspects of a programme unless there is a reason for them to seek them out and engage with them on their own terms.

Programme design	Learning and teaching activities are designed to be delivered and engaged with onsite at the provider, emphasising the physical, in-person aspects of learning. Teaching and learning activities may make use of digital presentation tools. Assessments are designed to be undertaken and submitted in an analogue format, although some digital submission of assessed work may be permitted.
Resources offered to students	Little or no digital teaching or learning focused resource will be offered to students, with most resources provided in analogue format, onsite. Some programme information, such as handbooks or regulations may be accessible digitally.
Teaching and learning approach	Onsite, physical engagement. There will be a focus on lectures and tutorials delivered onsite possibly involving skills instruction, or other lab/workshop/studio/performance space sessions.

Technology used to facilitate modes of delivery	Usually limited to a provider's website, digital presentation tools (such as PowerPoint) and readily available software for communication (for example, Zoom or Teams). A virtual learning environment may be provided but will primarily be used as a repository for programme documentation, allowing students to access this if they choose to.
Provider support offered to students	Primarily, support is offered to students onsite. Students may be able to access some support digitally via email, phone or videoconference.
Personalisation	Limited opportunity to personalise engagement with the learning and teaching. All students will be provided with the same resources, and teaching is designed to be experienced by a cohort synchronously.

Supportive digital engagement/experience

Where some of the learning and teaching activities developed by a provider are supported by digital support materials. Students will primarily experience these activities onsite, at the provider, but may choose to engage with digital learning resources to support their learning even though they are not a required part of a programme.

Programme design	Learning and teaching activities are designed to be delivered and engaged with onsite, and supplemented with digital resources. Assessments are designed to be undertaken and submitted in analogue format(s), although some digital submission of assessed work may be permitted.
Resources offered to students	Digital learning focused resource will be offered to students to supplement other resources provided onsite. Teaching and learning materials, such as lecture notes, will often be made available digitally, usually after the onsite activities have been delivered. Most programme information, such as handbooks or regulations will be accessible digitally.
Teaching and learning approach	There will be an emphasis on lectures and tutorials delivered onsite, possibly involving skills instruction, or other lab/workshop/studio/performance space sessions. These may be supplemented by video sessions or the use of lecture capture technology to allow students to engage with this learning digitally.
Technology used to facilitate delivery	An expectation that digital presentation tools will be used as well as readily available software for communication. A virtual learning environment will be provided and there will be greater engagement with staff and between students using either the virtual learning environment or other platforms. There will also be a repository for programme support documentation and other digital resources designed to support teaching and learning activities.

Provider support offered to students	Support is likely to be offered to students onsite but supplemented with digital support mechanisms. Students may be able to access similar support digitally via email, phone or videoconference.
Personalisation	Some opportunities to personalise engagement with the learning may be offered. Often this will be through engagement with support materials. All students may be offered the same access to any digital support materials but will be able to choose how, and the extent to which, they want to access it. Teaching is likely to be designed to be experienced by a cohort synchronously.

Augmented digital engagement/experience

Where learning and teaching activities developed by a provider are designed with digital learning aspects as a core part of the engagement, intended to enhance students' experience of onsite learning. Students will be required to engage with digital aspects of learning but can choose the extent of their engagement depending on subject and type of digital learning activity.

Programme design	Learning and teaching activities are designed to be delivered and engaged with onsite, with digital activities being included as integral parts of these activities. Assessments are designed to be both undertaken and submitted in either digital or analogue format, with some digital approaches to marking being designed.
Resources offered to students	Most digital teaching or learning focused resource will be offered to students with only some designed to be offered only onsite. Most teaching and learning materials, such as lecture notes, will be made available digitally. All programme information, such as handbooks or regulations will be accessible digitally.
Teaching and learning approach	While the bulk of teaching and learning will take place onsite, some will have digital elements or be delivered entirely digitally. Any skills instruction, or other lab/workshop/studio/performance space sessions will usually be delivered onsite, with a blend of digital and onsite delivery of lectures, tutorials and seminars. Lecture capture technology is likely to be used to allow students to determine how, and when, they want to engage with some learning and teaching activities.
Technology used to facilitate delivery	Advanced digital presentation tools (requiring student involvement) are likely to be used as well as readily available or bespoke software for communication between staff or students. A virtual learning environment will have been designed to facilitate digital teaching and learning activities, potentially hosting the software that enables students to engage with staff and each other. While there will be access to a repository of digital information, students will be encouraged to engage with the digital tools available when undertaking most of their teaching and learning activities. The platforms used to support these activities will enable personalisation of the student experience. Where appropriate, specialist software and platforms will be offered to students to enable them to further engage with their learning.

Provider support offered to students	Support is likely to be offered to students onsite but similar support may be offered digitally. Students may be offered follow-up digital support after engaging initially onsite. Digital support may be offered when onsite support is not available.
Personalisation	Students may be offered a number of ways to personalise their engagement with the learning and teaching. All students will be offered access to the same digital resources, but they may be able to choose how, and the extent to which, they want to access it. Teaching is mainly designed to be experienced by a cohort synchronously, but activities are designed to allow asynchronous engagement.

Interactive digital engagement/experience

Where digital learning and teaching activities are designed by a provider as the primary way in which students will engage, both with the programme and with each other. Students will be required to be actively engaged with these digital activities and will have less choice about this engagement. Some learning and teaching may be available onsite, at a provider, but this will not be a required part of a programme.

Programme design	Learning and teaching activities are likely to be designed to use both digital and onsite delivery, allowing a seamless transition between the two. The majority of the teaching and learning resources offered to students is likely to be digital with some available onsite. This could be supported by some optional attendance onsite.
Resources offered to students	Analogue teaching or learning focused resource will be offered to students only to supplement other digital resources. Teaching and learning materials, such as lecture notes, will only be made available digitally, usually after the digital activities have been delivered. Most programme information, such as handbooks or regulations, will only be accessible digitally.
Teaching and learning approach	Teaching and learning is likely to be delivered almost exclusively digitally. There will be an emphasis on lectures and tutorials delivered digitally, with skills instruction conducted via videoconference. Some limited lab/workshop/studio/performance space sessions may be offered onsite at the provider. These may be supplemented by other, less formal onsite activities to allow students to engage with their cohort or staff in person.
Technology used to facilitate delivery	A fully integrated use of a virtual learning environment that will form students' main point of engagement with teaching and learning activities and the rest of their cohort. Specialist software and platforms will be offered to students to enable them to further engage with their learning, should they want to.
Provider support offered to students	Primarily, support is offered to students digitally. Students may be able to access some support onsite, but usually by appointment only.

Personalisation	Personalisation is extensive with each student having part of their engagement with teaching and learning designed to meet their expectations. While all digital information and resources will be available to students, not all students will engage with those resources in the same way, or at the same time. Teaching is designed to be experienced by a cohort asynchronously, but with the option to engage in some synchronous elements.

Immersive digital engagement/experience

Where digital learning and teaching activities are designed by a provider as the only way in which students will engage, both with the programme and with each other. Students will be required to engage with all the digital activities and will not be offered the opportunity to engage with learning and teaching activities onsite at the provider.

Programme design	Learning and teaching activities are designed to be engaged with digitally, emphasising the personal experience in learning. Teaching and learning activities are only offered digitally with students expected to access digital resources to supplement these activities. Assessments are designed to be undertaken, submitted and marked digitally.
Resources offered to students	Little or no onsite teaching or learning focused resource offered to students, with most resources provided digitally. Some analogue programme information, such as handbooks or regulations may be accessible onsite.
Teaching and learning approach	Digital engagement. There will be a focus on lectures and tutorials delivered digitally, possibly involving digital skills instruction (overseen by experts remote from the provider), or other lab/workshop/studio/performance space sessions, conducted via videoconference.
Technology used to facilitate modes of delivery	It is likely that a fully integrated use of a virtual learning environment will form students' only point of engagement with teaching and learning activities and the rest of their cohort. Specialist software and platforms will be provided to students to enable them to further engage with their learning.
Support provided to students	Support is likely to be offered to students digitally through the virtual learning environment, email, phone, videoconference or chat. Students may be able to request some onsite support but this may not be delivered by staff or at the site of the provider.
Personalisation	The entire learning experience is designed to be personalised by the student. Students will determine how they engage with every aspect of teaching and learning to meet their expectations. While all digital resources will be available to students, not all students will engage with those resources in the same way. Teaching is designed to be experienced by a cohort asynchronously with students learning at their own pace.

Section 3: Building a glossary

Alongside the discussion of umbrella terms and providing a structure for a classification of digital learning experiences, we have highlighted a number of associated terms that are used when communicating what elements of digital learning are being used. These we have set out below, alongside definitions we have developed through understanding how they are being used currently in the sector. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list but demonstrates the variety of terms which are being used and highlights the potential challenges faced by students when trying to get a clear understanding as to what their provider is offering them.

Term	Usage/definition
Assessment - computer-based	An assessment that is conducted using a desktop computer, laptop, tablet or mobile device. Typically, the assessment is both delivered and marked by an algorithm included in the assessment software loaded on the device. This term can also encompass automatic online assessment.
Assessment - online	An assessment that is conducted using a desktop, laptop or tablet device that is connected to the internet. Typically, the assessment is both delivered and marked by an algorithm included in the assessment software that is hosted on a remote server (or alternate device).
Assistive technology	A piece of equipment or system that is used to improve or enhance digital learning access and capability. This is particularly important to individuals with disabilities or difficulties in engaging with digital approaches to learning.
Asynchronous learning	Learning that does not occur in the same place or at the same time for a whole cohort. Students can access resources and communicate at any time and are not restricted to accessing this learning at any specific time. Enables students to learn at their own pace in their own time.
Augmented reality (AR)	Augmented reality is a process that overlays digital learning or teaching content onto the physical world. This term can also encompass *mixed reality or MR*.
Bring your own device	A term used to describe where students use their own devices to access digital resources to support learning activity.
Cloud-based hosting	Cloud-based hosting is the process of outsourcing an organisation's computing and storage resources to a remote service provider. Some or all of the resources required to deliver a programme can be stored and accessed by staff and students via the cloud using appropriate software and devices. Multiple users can access these resources at any one time.

Collaborative digital learning	An educational approach to learning that involves groups of learners working together, via digital means, to complete a task.
Content curation	Selecting, assembling, categorising and commenting on digital information for a particular purpose.
Content library	A content library is similar to a traditional library and is a digital store of folders and files which can be accessed by authorised users.
Content management system	A content management system is an application that is used to consistently manage content (for example, documents, images, videos) and allow multiple contributors to create, edit and publish content.
Digital access	The ability to participate in learning through digital means. This includes providing appropriate hardware and software to facilitate access to digital learning.
Digital assessment	Assessment activities that involve students digitally creating, submitting or completing work. Staff review this work and then either assess it using digital or analogue means to assess the work. Examples include digital examinations, plagiarism-detection software, virtual reality simulations, video performances or digital portfolios.
Digital cheating	Cheating is any action which is intended to enable a student to achieve an unfair academic advantage or to assist another student to do so. This includes, for example, plagiarism, collusion, use of 'contract cheating' services, examination cheating (for example, through accessing unauthorised materials in an exam), or falsification of research data. Digital cheating is cheating which occurs in a digital environment. Some forms of cheating may be more likely to occur in a digital environment where digital mechanisms may make them more easily accessible, although conversely digital mechanisms are used to assist in detecting cheating (for example, through anti-plagiarism software and digital proctoring).
Digital learning objects	Modular or discrete units of learning designed for digital delivery.
Digital literacy	An individual's ability to use digital information and relevant technologies to find, evaluate, create and communicate information. This type of literacy requires cognitive and technical skills.

Digital poverty	The recognition that some students have less or inferior access to devices by which to engage with digital approaches to learning. This also extends to a lack of access to an internet connection with little or no bandwidth which would negatively impact the quality of their digital learning experience.
Digital proctoring	A term to describe a form of invigilation for digital examinations. This can be done through the use of artificial intelligence (for instance, using face or voice recognition) or through using staff to proctor via a real-time video link. This can encompass the term online proctoring.
Discussion board	A more formal digital communications space or platform where students (and staff) can discuss and share elements of their programme. The Board could be specific to a module or programme or a community of students. Discussion boards are often highly structured around a topic and can be closely moderated to ensure that discussions are appropriate to that topic. Also see *discussion forum*.
Discussion forum	A less formal digital communication space which can be used to engage students in a wider discussion on a number of topics or subjects. Often forums are less structured than discussion boards but require similar moderation to ensure that discussions remain appropriate. Also see *discussion board*.
E-book	A virtual book acquired digitally as an alternative to a physical book. This is usually accessed digitally through virtual or digital libraries and portals.
E-portfolio	Where students are required to develop a body of digital work or evidence in order to demonstrate their skills in a given area, for example, games design or digital media. As with physical portfolios, e-portfolios can consist of several different types of evidence such as documents, reflective logs, images, videos, websites, blogs.
Flipped learning	A pedagogical approach which provides detailed individual instruction to individual students placing the onus on them to use digital resources to gain understanding of content, concepts or theories related to learning outcomes. This happens outside of a physical space. Students are then invited into a virtual or physical space to articulate and discuss their findings and are guided by teaching staff to ensure that gaps in knowledge are filled and further enquiries directed appropriately. This approach is designed to 'flip' the more didactic approach of lecture or tutorial-based instruction, followed by a more flexible approach to articulating what has been learned and any further enquiry.

Flexible learning	Using different modes of study and technologies of learning to enable students to manage their studies around other commitments and priorities and providing freedom of choice for learners of ways and times to learn, for example, through digital lectures or evening learning sessions.
Gamification	Method of teaching using games principles to enhance learning and engagement. This often involves the application of game-design elements and principles in non-game contexts, for instance, a set of activities and processes to solve problems by using or applying the characteristics of game elements. Often, this manifests as students being set, and completing, a series of tasks which contribute to reaching an overall goal. The aim of this approach is to maximise students' enjoyment and engagement through capturing their interest and inspiring them to continue learning.
Guided learning	When a student is being taught, supervised or instructed by an assessor, tutor or another person who facilitates learning and development. Guided learning takes place whether both physically - onsite at a provider - or remotely via digital means.
Mark/grade management system	A digital system of managing assessment grades and delivering marks to students.
Independent study/guided independent study	Study activity occurring outside lecture, seminar and other face-to-face activities with the teacher/lecturer. Usually involves reading and/or research undertaken by a student without the guidance of a member of teaching staff.
Learning management system	Digital design and delivery platform - usually accessed using devices - which enables various methods of teaching and learning delivery to be used. Through a learning management system, a provider can use, for example, video or podcasts to support and enhance digital learning methods.
Lecture capture	Where a live lecture is recorded and is uploaded as a digital video or podcast for students to view, either in real-time or after the lecture has finished.
Massive open online courses (MOOCs)	Short digital courses that students complete digitally, as there is no requirement for any physical attendance at a provider. They are most often open to a wide audience and not limited to those students already registered with an institution. While often based on learning and teaching delivered as part of a degree programme, they are not necessarily component parts of a larger programme and, as such, students who complete these short courses often do not receive academic credit. However, some students, on successful completion of their short

	course, may be offered advanced standing for entry to a programme at the provider offering the MOOC which does carry academic credit.
Microlearning	Small learning activities to demonstrate a specific skill or focus on a knowledge gap or term.
Mobile learning	The use of mobile devices (for example, phones or tablets) in teaching and learning activity. This term can encompass more traditional learning activities (such as reading digital versions of journals) or less traditional activities such as engaging in virtual simulations.
Online labs	A term to describe ways of replicating activities in physical labs such as simulations, experiments, virtual reality field trips and lab casts which connect staff and students through live streaming.
Offline learning	Offline learning takes place when students who are studying on a digital programme are involved in learning activity that does not involve digital engagement, for example, a student producing non-digital forms of creative work.
Pedagogy first	An approach to the development of digital learning in which the pedagogical approaches to be taken in the delivery of the programme are placed at the forefront and regarded as a key driver in the programme development and design process.
Personalised learning	Personalised learning is an educational approach that aims to customise learning for each student's strengths, needs, skills and interests. Students can have a degree of choice in how they learn as compared to the face-to-face lecture approach.
Platform	In the context of e-learning, platform would normally describe the software infrastructure on which a *virtual learning environment (VLE)* is constructed.
Podcast	An audio file made available digitally, often a radio broadcast, which can be downloaded to a device.
Portal	A web-based platform that provides a 'front door' for links to key sources of information. A student portal might, for example, provide links to a VLE, student email, learning resources and student support services.
Screen capture tool and screencast	Screen capture is software which allows a screenshot to be taken, annotated and edited. Screencast is a video recording of the screen on a person's device so that it can be shared with others. Audio or written explanatory commentary can be added.

Social learning	Social learning can be used to describe discussion board or forum participation, as well as any other groupwork activity that takes place digitally, where students discuss and learn from each other.
Synchronous learning	Learning that takes place with participants all engaging with material in real time, although not necessarily in the same place (for example, some students may participate onsite while others may participate remotely, both at the same time).
Technology enhanced learning	Technology enhanced learning is an overarching term to describe the use of technology to support learning, teaching and assessment and to enhance the student experience. Technology enhanced learning can support teaching and learning both onsite and remotely. The term *web enhanced learning* is sometimes used synonymously with technology enhanced learning; although the former is, by definition, a more focused term relating to all technology used to support learning while web enhanced learning focuses on the connectivity and the use of web-enabled resources.
Vodcast	A video file made available digitally, often a video version of a radio broadcast, which can be downloaded to a device. This term can also encompass Vlogs.
Virtual classroom	A digital environment provided through a virtual learning platform, which replicates the physical classroom in a virtual way, allowing tutors and staff to communicate, interact and engage synchronously in teaching and learning activities.
Virtual learning environment (VLE)	A platform for supporting learning and teaching (particularly digital learning) and providing a space for learning resources. The precise functions and facility provided by each platform will vary and there will be options to customise and add packages depending on needs. In most cases, a VLE will, as a minimum, provide a repository for documentation (for example, programme/module information, timetables, policies and procedures), provide a message facility and support the submission of assessments and provision of feedback on assessed work.
Webinar	A web-based learning or training activity, usually interactive, for example, a workshop or seminar. Webinars take place synchronously using video conferencing software, with participants taking part digitally. Webinars may be recorded and made available as a video for asynchronous viewing.

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