BLENDED & ONLINE LEARNING POLICY

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KINGS INNS 1541

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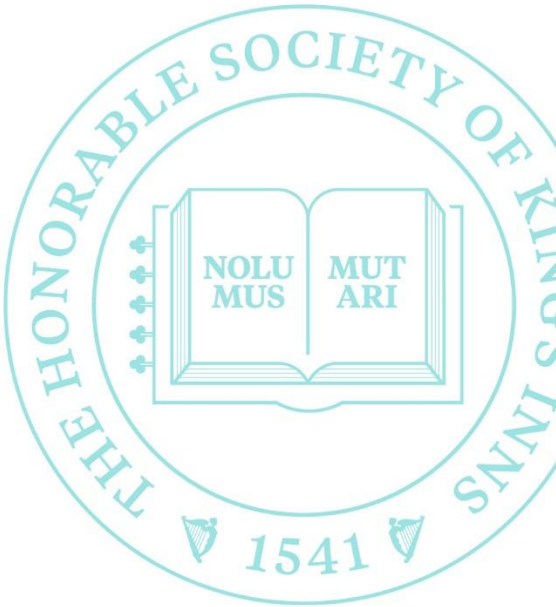

KINGS INNS 1541

1. Purpose of Policy

This policy outlines the principles governing quality assurance and quality enhancement of blended and online learning provision at King's Inns, maintaining high standards of education while enhancing flexibility and accessibility. The policy reflects King's Inns commitment to providing high quality teaching of the most up-to-date material using modern and appropriate methods of teaching and delivery. This includes the use of information technology to provide as flexible a service as possible to our learners. The policy was developed in keeping with the QQI Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Learning Programmes (2023).

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Support vision and strategic approach of King's Inns to the delivery of quality programmes provided by blended and/or fully online learning.
- Cater for diverse learner needs in supporting both on-site and distance learners, through the provision of flexible blended and fully online learning programmes.
- Establish clear expectations and support mechanisms for staff and learners engaged in blended or online education.
- Establish mechanisms to ensure quality enhancement and the continuous improvement of blended and online learning educational provision.
- Demonstrate how blended and online learning provision at King's Inns is developed in keeping with the guidelines issued by QQI.

2. Scope of Policy

This policy applies to all programmes of study offered by King's Inns delivered in full or part via digital platforms, including synchronous (real-time) and asynchronous (self-paced) formats. It covers teaching faculty, administrative staff, and learners engaged in digital learning at all levels.

3. Definitions[1]

Fully Online Learning is defined by QQI as "a type of programme where all teaching occurs entirely online, either synchronously or asynchronously, or in combination. Importantly, learners can complete their programme of study at a distance with no in-person or on-site requirements".

Blended Learning is defined by QQI as "a type of programme where teaching, learning and assessment occur using a mix of on-site and online learning, with the online components taking place synchronously, asynchronously, or in combination".

Hybrid Learning is a mix of online and in-person teaching, where online elements may occur synchronously or asynchronously as a core part of the programme.

[1] Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Learning Programmes (https://www.qqi.ie/sites/default/files/2023-10/statutory-qa-guidelines-for-providers-of-blended-and-online-programmes-2023.pdf)

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Learning Management System is a software application designed to facilitate the administration, documentation, tracking, reporting, and delivery of educational and training programmes. It serves as a centralised platform that enables organisations to manage their learning processes effectively.

Artificial Intelligence. QQI defines artificial intelligence as "machine-based systems that can generate content, make predictions, recommendations, or decisions that influence real or virtual environments".

4. Policy Statement

In an era of unprecedented technological evolution, digital innovations are fundamentally restructuring how we interact with information and educational resources. The educational landscape mirrors this broader technological shift. Contemporary learning environments are increasingly characterised by digital integration, with online platforms, interactive tools, and remote learning capabilities becoming standard rather than exceptional. Virtually no educational programme remains untouched by digital technologies, which now serve as critical infrastructure for teaching, learning, and assessment.

Blended learning models, which combine traditional and digital instructional methods, represent the new paradigm. These approaches leverage technology to extend educational reach, personalise learning experiences, and provide flexible, accessible educational opportunities that transcend traditional classroom boundaries.

4.1 Guiding Principles

The policy is built around guiding principles designed to ensure the provision of high-quality programmes supported by blended and online learning:

- **Learner-centred design**: Programmes are designed with the learner in mind, promoting active engagement and interaction.
- **Upholding academic integrity**: Measures such as multi-factor authentication, plagiarism detection, and information on extent to which the use of AI is permitted on a programme (if at all) are in place to maintain academic integrity.
- **Equitable access to high quality online learning**: Online learning platforms, materials, and tools comply with accessibility standards, ensuring equitable access for learners with a disability, and also take into account learners who may face digital infrastructure challenges, or those learners who are studying while abroad.
- **Digital capability:** Specialist, reliable and accessible digital tools and platforms are provided for designing, developing and facilitating online learning.
- **Support for staff:** Processes are in place for the induction and training of teaching staff specific to blended and online learning. Technical support is provided for teaching staff to support the delivery of digital education.
- **Support for learners:** Specialist technical support is provided for learners at designated times.
- **Quality enhancement and continuous improvement:** Quality assurance procedures are in place where relevant performance data informs regular reports, cyclical reviews, and institutional self-assessment of blended and/or fully online learning provision.

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4.2 Organisational Context

- King's Inns is committed to the provision of quality programmes supported by blended and/or fully online learning
- King's Inns invests in infrastructure and allocates funding and resources to ensure quality blended and/or fully online learning programmes
- King's Inns has policies and processes that are fit-for-purpose for the provision of blended and/or fully online learning programmes
- Recruitment, admissions policies and learner information systems and related processes are in place that allow learners on blended and online programmes to efficiently register, pay relevant fees and access crucial information
- King's Inns has systems in place that allows learners to regularly evaluate the quality of their blended and/or fully online learning experiences
- Quality assurance procedures are in place which will allow relevant performance data to inform reports, cyclical reviews, and institutional self-assessment of blended and/or fully online learning provision.

4.3 Programme Design and Delivery

- **Programme information**: Prospective learners are provided with comprehensive information on admission criteria, programme content, teaching and assessment methodologies, attendance requirements and key dates.
- **Content Delivery**: In blended and online programmes, instruction incorporates synchronous and/or asynchronous components delivered via a modern, fit for purpose digital infrastructure. Active engagement by learners in online learning environments is encouraged, in adherence to the principles of learner-centred education. Learners have access to online resources and library guides via the Moodle LMS. All learners (including those studying remotely) have access to a suite of online legal databases to which King's Inns subscribes.
- **Learning Objectives**: Programmes are structured around clear, measurable outcomes that align with the knowledge, skills and competences expected at each level of award.
- **Assessment**: Online assessments are conducted using secure digital platforms with plagiarism detection tools in place to uphold academic integrity. Learners may also be required to install and use software which locks access on their device to any prohibited materials for the duration of an examination. Learners are provided with access to online practice test areas, to familiarise themselves with the structure and format of online assessments and to ensure that their devices have the required technical specifications to run each online assessment.
- **Feedback**: Regular feedback opportunities, such as online surveys, are available to learners, with responses used to inform programme reviews and self-evaluations leading to the continuous improvement of programmes.
- **Quality Standards**: Programme design reflects best practice in digital pedagogy and clearly articulates expected learning outcomes.
- **Digital Infrastructure**: King's Inns has a digital infrastructure in place to support online and blended learning, including a Learning Management System (Moodle), video content management system (Echo360) and video conferencing system (Zoom). In case of outages or failure of the digital infrastructure, contingency measures are in place to allow blended and/or online learning programmes to

continue with minimal disruption. All learners at King's Inns are provided with a Microsoft 365 account appropriate to their programme of study, including King's Inns email. King's Inns adheres to data security and GDPR requirements.

- **Helpdesk Facilities:** King's Inns staff and learners have access to a virtual IT helpdesk, which is monitored during office hours.
- **Cybersecurity**: King's Inns staff are provided with regular web-based training on cybersecurity.

4.4 Academic Integrity

Ensuring academic integrity is of paramount importance in safeguarding the credibility and reputation of King's Inns qualifications and upholding the status the National Framework of Qualifications. King's Inns has a policy, codes, guidelines and regulations to support learners and staff to uphold academic integrity. Assessment protocols and processes are in place to ensure a reliable and secure means of submitting and assessing leaners' work.

- **Plagiarism Prevention**: Guidance on the importance of academic integrity, and the consequences of breaching King's Inns regulations on academic integrity, is provided to learners. Plagiarism detection software is utilised across all programmes at King's Inns.
- **Verification of Identity**: King's Inns uses multi-factor authentication for all staff and learner Microsoft365 online accounts. Secure processes for verifying learner identity during assessments are implemented to maintain confidence in the integrity of the evaluation process.

Artificial Intelligence – King's Inns regulations on academic integrity contains guidance on the permitted and/or prohibited use of artificial intelligence tools. Learners are reminded, prior to each assignment submission or assessment sitting, of the provisions in the Education Rules and Student Code of Conduct regarding academic integrity and the consequences of breaching those provisions.

4.5 Staff Training and Development

- Training and support are provided in the use of digital technologies such as Moodle, Echo360, and Zoom.
- Updates are provided on AI technology advancements, including both the opportunities AI brings to support learning, and the potential threats to academic integrity of unauthorised AI use.
- Staff attend relevant conferences and symposia to keep up to date with advances in educational technologies and artificial intelligence implications for education, and to connect with peers from other educational institutions to share best practice.

4.6 Learner Support

King's Inns is committed to supporting learners engaged in online and blended learning programmes. Upon enrolment, learners are granted access to a dedicated technical "how-to" area on Moodle, which offers guidance on the use of Moodle, Zoom and Echo360. Administrative and educational support is provided for each programme by assigned programme teams, while a virtual IT support helpdesk offers technical assistance during published hours. Up-to-date records of attendance and progress are maintained, enabling timely interventions for struggling learners. Online programme communication between

learners, faculty, and peers is facilitated using digital technologies. Regular feedback is sought from learners about their learning experience, to inform continuous review and improvement of online and blended programme offerings.

4.7 Data Protection and Privacy

King's Inns is committed to protecting the privacy and personal data of all learners, staff, and stakeholders in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Comprehensive data protection policies and procedures are in place to ensure compliance with GDPR requirements and are available to staff and learners. Where required, personal data is collected, processed, and stored securely, with access limited to authorised personnel only. King's Inns staff receive data protection training, and a dedicated Data Protection Officer is in place to oversee GDPR compliance and address any potential data protection concerns.

4.8 Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement

- **Evaluation**: Online and blended programmes are subject to regular review, based on learner feedback, completion rates, and learning analytics. Programme reviews and updates and self-evaluations are informed by this feedback.
- **Learning Analytics**: Where appropriate, data on learner engagement and performance is collected to identify areas for improvement and support learner success, in accordance with data privacy regulations.
- **Learning Technology updates:** King's Inns teaching faculty, IT team, and learning technologist work together to keep abreast of developments in learning technology and to better understand the potential impact of advances in artificial intelligence on the education landscape.

4.9 Partnerships and Collaborations

Where online or blended learning involves partnerships with other institutions or third-party providers, agreements are in place that define roles, responsibilities, and quality assurance measures. All collaborative arrangements comply with King's Inns academic and quality standards, ensuring consistency across all programmes of study.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

The Dean of the School of Law is the owner of this policy and will, in conjunction with the School of Law Faculty Board and with the Senior Management Team (SMT), oversee the implementation of the policy.

6. Monitoring and Review

The policy owner is responsible for monitoring implementation of the policy, ensuring that all associated documents are updated and current, and that the policy is reviewed as required

The policy will be reviewed every three years from the date of first approval unless changes are required owing to legal, statutory and/or organisational change.

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All policies and policy changes are approved by Council on the recommendation of Standing Committee. Policies relating to the School of Law will be reviewed in the first instance by the Education Committee before being recommended to Standing Committee

7. Associated Documents

- King's Inns Strategic Plan
- Assessment Regulations (Barrister-at-Law degree)
- Education Rules
- Student Code of Conduct
- Online Learning Protocols

8. Referenced Policies

- Academic Integrity Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Learner Feedback Policy

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