![QQI Quality and Qualifications Ireland / Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann]

Reengagement Panel Report

Assessment of QA Procedures for Blended Learning

Part 1   Details of provider

1.1   Applicant Provider

Registered Business/Trading Name:	Dublin Business School
Address:	13/14 Aungier Street, Dublin 2, D02 WC04.
Date of Application:	25 September 2019
Date of resubmission of application:	
Date of evaluation:	13 November 2019
Date of site visit (if applicable):	13 November 2019
Date of recommendation to the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee:	05 December 2019

1.2   Profile of provider

Dublin Business School (DBS) was established in 1975. It provides undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in the fields of Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, Business, Law, Management, Marketing and ICT. It also provides professional and executive education and training; including preparation for accountancy examinations. The majority of its students are fee-paying with a small number funded through the Springboard + training fund administered by the Higher Education Authority (HEA).

DBS enrols over 8,000 students per year, over half of whom are part-time evening students and the remainder full-time day students. Approximately one third of DBS students are international. The majority come from EU countries, with large numbers also from India, China, Malaysia, the United States and Brazil. Three quarters of its students are enrolled on programmes validated by QQI. The remainder are enrolled on unaccredited professional programmes or on programmes leading to awards of other bodies; such as the Institute of Commercial Management (ICM).

In 2003 DBS was acquired by Kaplan Inc., an international education company. Kaplan's programmes include higher education and professional programmes, language instruction, test preparation and

services to elementary and secondary learners. DBS has 400 staff and has focused in recent years on filling key academic and leadership posts to increase its organisational capacity and the quality of its outputs. Amongst these roles are a number designed to support the implementation and development of blended learning.

Part 2   Panel Membership

Name	Role of panel member	Organisation
Professor Brian Bowe, Head of Academic Affairs and Assistant Registrar	Chair	Technological University Dublin (TUD)
Tom O'Mara, Head of Digital Education	Blended learning expert	University College Cork (UCC)
Dr Trish O'Brien, Consultant	Independent Report writer	O'BRIEN / Governance Design (OBGD)

Part 3   Findings of the Panel

3.1   Summary Findings

The Panel was impressed with the quality of the documentation presented by DBS in its application for approval of its blended learning quality assurance procedures. The college followed a similar approach to its application for re-engagement, undertaking an analysis of its documentation and processes against QQI's *Quality Assurance Guidelines for Blended Learning Programmes* (2018).

The college is taking a pilot project approach to introducing blended learning to its programme delivery. The Panel spoke with a large cross-section of staff managing all aspects of the operation of the pilot. Based on these discussions, and its review of the documentation submitted by the provider, the Panel is confident that the approach being taken is thoughtful, comprehensive, and is enthusiastically supported by participating staff. The Panel is satisfied that it can recommend to QQI the approval of DBS's quality assurance procedures for blended learning. It has identified three 'specific advices' for the college, which are specified in section 5.2.

3.2 Recommendation of the panel to Programmes and Awards Executive Committee of QQI

	Tick <u>one</u> as appropriate
Approve Dublin Business School's draft QA procedures for Blended Learning	X
Refuse approval of Dublin Business School's draft QA procedures for blended learning **pending mandatory changes** set out in Section 6.1 (If this recommendation is accepted by QQI, the provider may make a revised application within six months of the decision)	
Refuse to approve Dublin Business School's draft QA procedures for blended learning	

Part 4   Evaluation of draft QA Procedures for Blended Learning submitted by Dublin Business School (DBS)

The following is the panel's findings following evaluation of Dublin Business School's quality assurance procedures for blended learning against QQI's Topic Specific QA Guidelines - Blended Learning.

Panel Findings:

DBS outlined to the Panel how it has been building an infrastructure that can facilitate the development and implementation of a blended learning approach. It has modified its staffing structures, introduced new staff roles, and invested in IT.   It acknowledged that blended learning is a new departure for the college, and that it wishes to approach its introduction in a planned and methodical manner that represents minimum risk to the learning experience. Whilst new to DBS, the college can draw on the experience of its parent company, Kaplan Inc., which has a substantial track record in blended and online learning.

The pilot approach to blended learning delivery that is being undertaken by the college, has been decided in a collaborative manner and via a steering group of individuals with QA, academic, resource and technology perspectives. Its objective is to situate the college's understanding of blended learning in practice, and to continue to develop its quality assurance procedures and systems in the light of that experience.

For the pilot, blended learning delivery will be limited to two modules on any programme and to a maximum of 15 ECTS credits on a 180 ECTS credit programme. Delivery will be through a blend of face-to-face classes, live online classes, and online materials and activities. The college explained the process of identifying modules that are suitable for blended learning delivery. This includes, analysis of module learning outcomes and assessment methods; discussion between academic and education technology staff; and the need to have a variety of modules to inform the pilot. When a module is identified for blended learning delivery, a standard methodology is employed to transition it to blended learning delivery. It commences with the use of the ABC to VLE curriculum design and advances to detailed planning of activities through Trello, and the creation of visual and trailer boards. Moodle course pages have been templated and assessments are created through the system; the results of which can be transferred to the college's student system. The college provided the Panel with a presentation on this process and showed it the Moodle course page templates. Lecturers in attendance provided the Panel with an overview of their experiences in engaging with the pilot, and with feedback from learners on how blended learning delivery is impacting the teaching and learning experience to date.

The college indicated that it is reviewing how it could appropriately reward performance in online

assessments. The specific example discussed was the use of online multiple choice questions (MCQs) for summative assessment purposes. In this regard, the Panel considered that it is important that the college investigate tools that can authenticate learner assessments completed online. DBS explained that it is in discussions with an online proctoring service being offered by a third-party company based in Dublin. The Panel advised that this should be explored further, perhaps with consideration given also to the use of lock-down browser software. More generally, the college confirmed that the same assessment quality assurance measures, such as external examining, will apply to modules that have been delivered through a blended learning approach.

DBS is aware of the challenges that the introduction of a blended learning approach can represent for staff delivering modules and programmes. It is focussing on staff training and the provision of technical and pedagogical supports. Education technology assistance is being provided centrally to enable the transition to this additional mode of delivery, but it is anticipated that lecturers will become capable of managing these tasks in time. The college is seeking to quantify, through the pilot, the workload that blended learning represents for staff, and how this can be acknowledged in staff contracts. The Panel has given a specific advice that the college should consider the scalability of the pilot, when it has further evidence of these workload implications.

DBS is also mindful of ensuring that its learners are assisted in the transition to blended learning. The college is confident that learners are fully equipped to engage with the online resources available to them. It has responded to requests from learners to use college facilities to view these resources. This can arise because learners want to avail of better equipment and broadband; some learners also wish to view materials with fellow learners. The college is actively monitoring learner engagement in a blended learning environment, including through the use of surveys and by analysing Moodle analytics. Student engagement staff are contacting learners where concerns around their participation levels are identified. This monitoring activity will inform an overall evaluation of the effectiveness of the blended learning pilot.

Whilst the purpose of this review event was to focus on 'blended learning' the Panel and the college agreed that in more routine circumstances, a narrative of teaching and learning that assumes the incorporation of blended learning may be less disconcerting and more familiar to potential staff participants. The Panel has given a specific advice about this. In the same way, the college is aware of the dangers of building systems within systems and is actively ensuring that it takes opportunities to build on and adjust current systems, processes, methods and procedures, rather than creating new ones unnecessarily for blended learning delivery.

Part 5   Mandatory Changes to QA Procedures for Blended Learning and Specific Advice

5.1   Mandatory Changes

1.   No mandatory changes are proposed by the Panel.

5.2   Specific Advice

1.   If the college is going to reward summative assessment that is undertaken using online tools, it should investigate online proctoring and locked browser solutions, to assure the integrity of assessment outcomes.
2.   When evaluating the outcomes of its blended learning pilot, the college should be cognisant of the scalability of the model it has piloted, including in terms of the workload it represents for education technology and academic staff.
3.   The college should consider its use of the term 'blended learning' in an internal context, and whether it can be replaced with more comprehensive teaching and learning terminology that is more familiar and comfortable to potential academic participants.

Part 6   Approval by Chair of the Panel

This report of the panel is approved and submitted to QQI for its decision on the approval of the draft Quality Assurance Procedures on Blended Learning, of Dublin Business School (DBS).

Name: _____

Date: 20th November 2019

Annexe 1: Documentation provided to the Panel in the course of the Evaluation

Documentation submitted to the Panel prior to site visit

- o Blended learning guidelines mapping
- o Draft Blended Learning Policy
- o Blended learning plan
- o Information on programmes/modules that will incorporate blended learning

Annexe 2: Provider staff met in the course of the Evaluation

Name	Role/Position
Andrew Conlan-Trant	Executive Dean
Lori Johnston	Registrar
Kerry McCall Magan	Head of Academic Programmes
Emma Balfe	Head of Faculty and School (Acting)
Tony Murphy	Head of Quality Enhancement and Innovation in Teaching and Learning
Grant Goodwin	QA Officer
Martin Doris	Assistant Registrar
Eddie Ormonde	Head of IT
Darragh Breathnach	Head of Academic Operations
Andrew Quinn	Course Director, Accounting and Finance
David Williams	Course Director, ICT
Cathal O'Keeffe	Course Director, Psychology, Psychotherapy and Social Studies

Miguel Flores	Course Director (Business and Law Programmes)
Anna Sitkowska	Instructional Designer
Isabel Ashburner	Learning Technologist
Bernadette Higgins	ICT Lecturer, Moodle Specialist, and Staff Training Manager
John Noble	Lecturer
Ciara Devine	Lecturer
Deaglan Page	Lecturer

Appendix: Provider response to the Reengagement Panel Report

Dr Deirdre Stritch,   21st November 2019
Quality and Qualifications Ireland
26/27 Denzille Lane
Dublin 2
D02 P266

Dear Deirdre,

DBS Blended Learning QA Procedures

I am writing to submit DBS's formal response to the Panel Re-Engagement Report for Blended Learning. The report is factually accurate, and responses to the Specific Advice are given below.

DBS is very grateful to the panel for their advice and considerations, and we would like to extend our thanks once again for the considerable time and effort involved.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should QQI or the panel require anything further.

Yours sincerely,

Lori Johnston
Registrar

Reponses to Specific Advice

1. If the college is going to reward summative assessment that is undertaken using online tools, it should investigate online proctoring and locked browser solutions, to assure the integrity of assessment outcomes.	The College is considering online proctoring software for conducting online assessments. We have had meetings and demonstrations from online proctoring services in 2018 and 2019 and this is something we consider important in order to ensure the integrity of assessment. In the immediate term, online summative assessments will be kept to a minimum.
2. When evaluating the outcomes of its blended learning pilot, the college should be cognisant of the scalability of the model it has piloted, including in terms of the workload it represents for education technology and academic staff.	An initial evaluation of the pilot will be carried out at the end of this semester (i.e. December 2019/January 2020) and this will include resource input as well as learner feedback and outcomes. Additional staff are currently being recruited to support blended learning development, but a full evaluation and costing will be carried out.
3. The college should consider its use of the term 'blended learning' in an internal context, and whether it can be replaced with more comprehensive teaching and learning terminology that is more familiar and comfortable to potential academic participants.	DBS is in agreement and this thinking is in keeping with our strategic goals towards innovation and quality in learning and teaching, whereby these aspects should be embedded in everything we do. It is important that we recognise all teaching activity as having blended elements. We will undertake research to consider how other HEIs with recognised excellence in learning and teaching approach this and will seek to embed this message across the College. Different terminology will be considered. DBS is also finalising a detailed glossary of key terminology used at DBS, for use by both learners and staff, and consideration of the term 'blended learning' and the DBS approach to blended learning will be included.