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“Fostering Socially Distanced and Inclusive on-Campus Education in Armenian HEIs”

POLICY PAPER

On Internal Quality Assurance of Online/Digital Teaching, Learning and Assessment

(Policy Recommendations and IQA Principles for
Armenian HEIs)

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1. Introduction

Digital transformation is reshaping higher education in Armenia. Universities increasingly use Learning Management Systems (LMS), mixed-mode delivery, online and hybrid courses, digital learning resources, and technology-enhanced assessments. This evolution creates new opportunities for access, flexibility and innovation, while at the same time requiring new approaches to ensuring consistent quality, promoting equity, strengthening academic integrity, and enhancing support for learners in digital environments.

This policy paper proposes a nationally coherent, evidence-based, ESG-aligned IQA framework for digital teaching, learning and assessment (TLA), applicable across all Armenian higher and vocational education institutions. It aims to ensure that digital education is high-quality, equitable, accessible, academically sound and continuously improved.

Quality assurance in digital teaching, learning and assessment must be understood as a systemic process embedded in institutional strategy and culture. High-quality digital education requires institutional leadership committed to digital transformation, the development of quality instructional materials, the establishment of specialized innovation and support units, clear pedagogical guidelines for technology-enhanced teaching, and continuous professional development for academic staff. Together, these elements form the foundation for sustainable and effective internal quality assurance in digital environments.

2. Policy Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this policy is to:

1. Establish a coherent national vision and internal quality assurance framework for digital TLA.
2. Define **criteria, indicators and procedures** that Armenian institutions should integrate into their IQA systems.
3. Support institutions in designing, delivering, evaluating and enhancing digital education.
4. Align Armenian practice with leading international models (ESG 2015, TeSLA, Ireland QQI, Estonia, AQU Catalunya, OECD).
5. Prepare institutions for future external QA requirements.

Policy Objectives:

- Enhance student learning experiences and digital learning opportunities.
- Strengthen academic integrity in online assessments.
- Ensure equitable access to high-quality digital education for all learners.
- Develop academic and technical staff capacity in digital pedagogy.
- Enhance institutional readiness for digital transformation.

3. Guiding Principles

The IQA framework is based on the following principles drawn from international best practice:

1. **Student-centred digital learning:** Engagement, interaction and autonomy must guide course design and pedagogy.
2. **Equivalence of quality across delivery modes:** Digital learning must achieve the same or better quality and learning experience as face-to-face instruction.
3. **Transparency and academic integrity:** Online assessment must be fair, valid, secure and trustworthy.
4. **Accessibility and inclusion:** Digital learning must be accessible to all, including students with disabilities, rural learners, and low-bandwidth users.
5. **Evidence-based decision-making:** Analytics, feedback and performance data must inform improvement.
6. **Staff competence and support:** High-quality digital education depends on well-prepared and supported staff.
7. **Ethical and responsible technology use:** Data protection, privacy, and AI governance must be ensured.
8. **Continuous enhancement:** Institutions must embed PDCA cycles and ongoing review mechanisms.

4. Internal Quality Assurance Criteria for Digital TLA

The following criteria constitute the official IQA framework for digital teaching, learning and assessment in Armenian educational institutions.

Criterion 1. Governance and QA Strategy

Policy Intent:

Ensure institutional commitment, leadership and accountability for digital education.

Institutions must have:

- A documented and approved digital/online education strategy or policy.
- Clear allocation of roles and responsibilities (Deans, QA Office, IT, Teaching & Learning Centre, programme committees).
- A dedicated body/committee overseeing the implementation and review of digital TLA quality.
- Digital teaching, learning and assessment integrated into institutional risk management and business continuity planning to ensure continuity of education during emergencies or disruptions.
- Student representation in institutional bodies responsible for overseeing the quality of digital teaching, learning and assessment.

Criterion 2. Curriculum and Digital Course Design

Policy Intent:

Ensure consistent, pedagogically sound and accessible course design.

Institutions must ensure that:

- Standards or templates for digital course design and LMS structure are used across programmes.
- Digital courses integrate multimedia and interactive elements to support engagement.
- Course content is reviewed regularly for accuracy and relevance.
- New digital courses undergo formal approval, including instructional design or peer review.

Criterion 3. Digital Teaching, Learning and Interaction

Policy Intent:

Promote high-quality digital pedagogy supporting active learning and interaction.

Institutions must ensure:

- Guidelines exist for effective digital teaching (synchronous/asynchronous balance, active learning).
- Instructor presence standards are defined (response times, announcements, facilitation).
- Structured opportunities for student collaboration and interaction are embedded.
- Mechanisms are in place to reduce student isolation (group activities, forums, communities).
- Digital content meets accessibility standards.
- Teaching effectiveness in the digital environment is evaluated.

Criterion 4. Faculty Development and Support

Policy Intent:

Build institutional capacity for high-quality digital teaching.

Institutions must provide:

- Mandatory foundational training before teaching online.
- Continuous professional development in digital pedagogy.
- Instructional design, media production and technical support services.
- Digital content creation tools and resources.
- Peer mentorship or communities of practice

Criterion 5. Student Assessment and Academic Integrity

Policy Intent:

Ensure fairness, validity and integrity in digital assessments.

Institutions must ensure that:

- Assessment policies explicitly include digital/online assessment standards.
- Online assessments are valid, reliable and aligned with learning outcomes.
- Academic integrity mechanisms (authentication, proctoring, plagiarism detection) are implemented.
- Diverse assessment formats are encouraged (formative, summative, authentic tasks).
- Feedback quality and turnaround time follow institutional standards.
- Assessment strategies are designed to remain valid, fair and meaningful in digital environments where artificial intelligence tools are widely available.

Criterion 6. Student Support and Digital Services

Policy Intent:

Ensure effective academic, technical and psychological support for online learners.

Institutions must provide:

- Orientation and digital skills training for all online learners.
- Accessible academic advising, tutoring, library and technical support adapted for digital learners.
- Policies ensuring digital materials comply with accessibility requirements.
- Measures promoting digital well-being, including reasonable expectations regarding online availability, workload balance, and prevention of digital fatigue for students and staff.

Criterion 7. Technology, Infrastructure and Reliability

Policy Intent:

Ensure that digital learning is supported by reliable and secure technological systems.

Institutions must ensure:

- Formal processes for evaluating and approving educational technologies.
- Monitoring of LMS reliability, performance and usability.
- Adequate technical assistance (preferably 24/7) for students and staff.

Criterion 8. Data Privacy, Protection and Security

Policy Intent:

Protect student data and ensure responsible data use.

Institutions must have:

- A formal data protection policy consistent with legal norms.
- Clear procedures for obtaining informed consent from students and staff.
- Mechanisms for secure storage, handling and transmission of data.
- Regular cybersecurity audits and response plans.

Criterion 9. Ethics and Digital Equity

Policy Intent:

Promote ethical technology use and ensure equal access to digital learning.

Institutions must ensure:

- An ethical framework for the use of learning analytics and student data.
- Policies governing transparent and ethical use of AI in teaching and assessment.
- Institution-wide strategies promoting academic integrity in digital contexts.
- Measures addressing digital inequities including:

- access to appropriate devices and reliable internet connectivity;
- development of students' and staff's digital literacy;
- **accessibility and inclusive design of teaching, learning and assessment materials for persons with disabilities;**
- **alignment of digital education policies and practices with gender equality and non-discrimination principles;**
- support mechanisms for learners in rural, remote, or low-bandwidth contexts.

Criterion 10. Monitoring, Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

Policy Intent:

Ensure that digital education is continuously monitored and improved.

Institutions must:

- Collect student feedback on digital learning regularly.
- Collect faculty feedback on digital teaching needs.
- Analyse analytics and performance data to identify improvement areas.
- Share quality review findings across the institution.
- Update digital tools and course content periodically.

5. Expected Impact

Implementation of this policy will:

- Improve consistency and quality of digital learning across institutions.
- Enhance academic integrity and reliability of online assessments.
- Strengthen the digital competencies of teaching staff.
- Improve equity, accessibility and learner experience.
- Foster data-informed decision-making.
- Increase institutional readiness for future external QA processes.

6. Conclusion

Digital transformation offers significant opportunities for Armenian higher and vocational education, but requires a structured, criteria-based and internationally aligned internal QA framework. This policy paper provides a comprehensive foundation for institutions to ensure high-quality digital teaching, learning and assessment while maintaining ESG compliance and promoting innovation, equity and student success.



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