

LEARNING & TEACHING PAPER #16

Curriculum and assessment
Thematic Peer Group Report

Chair: Stephen Rutherford, Cardiff University, United Kingdom

Coordinators: Ulf-Daniel Ehlers & Thérèse Zhang

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European University Association asbl

Avenue de l'Yser 24

Rue du Rhône 114

1040 Brussels

Case postale 3174

Belgium

1211 Geneva 3, Switzerland

+32 (0) 2 230 55 44

+41 22 552 02 96

www.eua.eu · info@eua.eu

Curriculum and assessment in a digital context: reaching a common understanding

This report is the result of the work carried out in the Thematic Peer Group “Curriculum and assessment” (hereafter referred to as “the group”), in the context of the project “Supporting European universities in their strategic approaches to digital learning” (DIGI-HE) (see Annex 2). The aim of the group was to explore how to embed digitally enhanced learning and teaching (DELT) and digital technologies in the curriculum, and how to design and manage coherent digital assessment so that it truly reflects intended learning outcomes, is engaging, diverse, high quality, and aligned with the curriculum.

Firstly, the group shares a vision of the curriculum in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) as rooted in a learning outcome-based paradigm, with constructive alignment² between curriculum and learning outcome design, delivery, and assessment. However, the group also observes that such learning-outcome based curriculum, which is also a departure point for addressing student-centred learning, is not rooted across European universities in the same way. Higher education institutions (HEIs) may be at different stages in implementing learning outcome-based approaches across all study programmes. The complexity of these contrasting situations, sometimes within the same institution, needs to be considered while reading the challenges and recommendations that follow.

The group discussed the factors and conditions for DELT in the curriculum, including assessment, as summarised in the following points:

1. In all institutions, curriculum design, development and delivery are subject to more-or-less flexible academic **regulations or policies**, providing standard information (programme information, learning outcomes description, sometimes description of main assessment methods and support provided to students, etc.), and subject to periodic review (by the institution itself and by a quality assurance (QA) agency). In addition, at institutional and/or faculty level, various academic, advisory or curriculum committees are dedicated to supervising, monitoring, and evaluating curricula. The involvement of the world of work (representatives from professions, employers, industry, etc.) in curriculum design also varies depending on institutional regulations and practices, and disciplines.

National or system-level regulations (law, QA disciplinary benchmark statements, funding rules, etc.) also play a role as they may enable innovation in teaching. In some disciplines, professional regulatory bodies also prescribe the curriculum.

Institutional guidelines for assessment are common practice. Within institutions, different faculties, study programmes, and modules within programmes, have some degree of autonomy in defining how to assess students. However, the degree of autonomy varies between national higher education cultures. Institutions are also in the process of adopting, or have already adopted, guidelines for remote assessment, due to emergency remote teaching. In some countries, national authorities may also have recently responded to pressures to adapt regulation, thus taking a role in this rapid change of pedagogy.

The balance between providing a framework for curricula, and enough room for teachers to experiment and practice DELT, needs to be found. In this regard, the pandemic created the impetus for educators to experiment with alternatives to face-to-face teaching. The question of curriculum innovation includes due reflection on how to monitor and evaluate student progression, and how to address sustainability for successful experimentations. An **institutional culture of using evidence** (from experimentation, exchange of practices, performance data, student feedback, results from quality assurance processes, scholarship of teaching and learning, etc.) to

support pedagogical development would be much needed for addressing this matter.³ Such evidence-based culture can be nurtured through the role and mission of an institutional learning and teaching centre, which would support producing and disseminating examples, and evaluating evidence.

2. One key factor defining the success or failure of integrating DELT into curricula is **motivating a critical mass of teachers**. Group members pointed to the need to share good practices in how to motivate colleagues across the institution – on curriculum change, adoption of DELT, and generally encouraging teachers to follow an evidence-based approach, instead of relying on fears, concerns, or preconceived beliefs.

Participative approaches with staff and students also help avoid a “guideline fatigue”, when there are too many guidelines related to curriculum and assessment, with not enough ownership from the first end-users.

3. The group discussed the issue of **resources needed to embed digital approaches**. Institutions may have different ways of defining key priorities and relating to resources needed, as well as documenting the process of curricular change. But generally, the group found that resourcing curriculum innovation requires:
 - ◆ due attention to the development of teaching methodologies, funding, and other support (staff, expertise);
 - ◆ adequate information on virtual learning environment (VLE) and learning management system (LMS) tools;
 - ◆ good coordination and complementarity between existing tools for students’ use;
 - ◆ adopting a minimal number of commonly used tools, to avoid cognitive overload of students learning to use new online platforms;⁴
 - ◆ and cooperation across different units to ensure good use of existing resources.
4. **Student support and welfare** in a digital education environment is important throughout the curriculum. More specifically, blended or online learning requires due attention to **combining synchronous and asynchronous learning activities and assignments** – with duly resourced materials and clear instructions for students to follow. While this may be familiar to teachers who had experienced digital formats before the pandemic, it may be new to others, and certainly not evenly mastered across institutions.
5. Group members pinned down the concept of “**assessment as (and for) learning**” as an interesting paradigm for progressing towards assessment which enhances student-centred learning, and nurtures a fair, inclusive, and efficient assessment culture. ‘Assessment as/for learning’ requires a real cultural shift, from evaluation of learning and a “teaching for testing” attitude, towards making assessment an active and integral part of the student learning process.

To this end, teachers’ **assessment literacy** (the understanding of the purpose and potential of assessment) may require further training and discussion between academic colleagues. It is important to note that **students’** assessment literacy also needs to be further supported, so they can fully grasp the potential of improving their learning through a variety of assessment methods. Students need to be actively involved in developing such literacy approaches so that they can take ownership of the change.

A scaled and scaffolding approach, from quick gains to authentic assessment, may be helpful for steadily bringing change, yet with some immediate and visible results.

6. Group members reported a general willingness to steer towards promoting regular, **formative assessment** (i.e., assessment to facilitate learning), and subsequently reduce the amount and pressure of **summative assessment** (i.e., assessment to measure student learning and competence). The group agreed that a fine balance needs to be found between summative and formative assessment, and that this balance should rest on an explicit definition of the intended learning outcomes for each assessment method.

The by-default paradigm for assessment at universities nowadays is still summative assessment, which provides grades/scores at the end of a course. Formative assessment is not the norm everywhere. The final choice is commonly left to individual teachers and course management teams.

While education science (pedagogic) literature may have addressed this topic for a long time, the pandemic and subsequent difficulties for ensuring adequate assessment for all students have triggered more reflection on how complementary and efficient assessment modes could be assured on a large scale.⁵

Challenges

The group identified the following challenges related to curriculum and assessment:

Challenge #1

The pandemic has magnified existing challenges, with a specific focus on the overall question of equity across the board.

- ♦ Can DELT really be the same experience for all, and any, student(s)? In particular, how can institutions address digital poverty, and make all learning materials accessible to all students?
- ♦ This need for equity relates to issues of inclusion: what flexibility would there be for students – could they choose the way they want to take the course (online, on site, blended, hybrid) and be assessed? Will it even be possible for a HEI to offer flexibility in each course? What happens if some students have more difficulties than others in using or accessing the same tools or resources?
- ♦ Equity questions related to assessment are not related only to DELT. Generally, assessment is designed to be applied identically to all students, while all students will not be equal *vis-à-vis* the same assessment method. DELT may enable students to achieve the same learning outcomes while producing different types of outputs with different digital tools.

Challenge #2

Considering effective practices and general attention towards DELT during the first months of the pandemic, institutions are now in the phase of reflecting on what effective strategies to adopt in order to embed digital teaching and assessment into the curriculum. Uncertainty towards the future still prevails. In addition, redesigning curricula also means rethinking various ways to operate across the institution.

- ♦ Emergency remote teaching under the pandemic is not the same as adopting sustainable, well-designed strategies for DELT across the institution. The latter remains a challenge, both in terms of conceptualisation and implementation.
- ♦ Institutions first need an evaluation of lessons learnt, and mapping of the variety of practices from emergency remote teaching. Given the heterogeneity of initiatives, not everything will be relevant to keep after the pandemic eases. But some practices (e.g., using virtual exchanges and Collaborative Online International Learning, or COIL, in a curricular context) may be worth considering retaining. Choosing sustainable gains from the pandemic period for the whole higher education sector in a given country will be a complex exercise.
- ♦ Institutions, and faculties within institutions, may experience different realities when addressing the right combination of blended, hybrid, online and physical learning after the pandemic. It might considerably change the way institutions operate, taking into account factors such as campus realities, facilities for hybrid learning, readiness of staff and students, extra-curricular activities, etc. It may also impact the way institutions collaborate with the world of work for (parts of) the curriculum, for instance for work-based learning or when students have to carry out traineeships. A dialogue addressing concrete modalities of collaboration with the world of work in the post-pandemic context will be necessary.

- ◆ Beyond the pandemic context, it is difficult to experiment with new ways to teach or conduct curricula. Failure and the learning-from-mistakes (trial-and-error) approach are not valued in higher education systems, which require some sort of accountability and risk mitigation to avoid failure. Accreditation and QA-related regulations typically do not leave a lot of leeway for risking failure.
- ◆ Resourcing change requires due attention to coordination across the institution. Information and virtual learning environment (VLE) systems, for instance, are still heterogeneous, making them complex to use.
- ◆ Resourcing change also means a budget for digital transformation and adequate equipment for all (staff, students, including at home).
- ◆ Digital skills, both for teachers to teach and for students to learn digitally, are at times lacking, and require training and support.
- ◆ The pandemic has also raised the question of how flexible, and even open, the curriculum could and should be, to quickly adapt to new situations or societal changes. Under emergency remote teaching situations, flexibility mainly concerned switching between physical and digital provision and assessment modes, and between summative and formative assessment. In the future, flexibility may become a general characteristic of curricula, teaching and assessment modes generally.
- ◆ Finally, assessment in a DELT context must go hand in hand with guarantees for academic integrity (avoiding ‘trolls’, hacking digital sessions, plagiarism and identity theft issues, etc.). Many HEIs struggled with the right balance between such guarantees and maximising flexibility.

Challenge #3

Change in curriculum management is intrinsically linked to change in teaching methods. To tackle both, teachers need to be further and better supported and empowered to experiment and innovate with digital teaching.

- ◆ The importance and value given to teaching (compared to other university missions and especially research) should be stressed again. The lack of parity of esteem is deep and has consequences on all aspects of academic teachers’ professional identity, including career paths. Also, time and effort invested into innovating teaching and researching on teaching are frequently not valued or accommodated.
- ◆ Investment into teacher training and a variety of support and incentive systems are needed, including for addressing different needs among teaching staff (depending on seniority, experience in teaching, etc.). So is mutual and peer support through exchanges of practices: teachers should not feel isolated and left to themselves in their teaching. Team teaching may also be an answer.
- ◆ Teacher training needs to be properly resourced. Expertise for designing and organising teacher training is not always available; capacity building is necessary in this regard.
- ◆ Group members also pointed to a generational/age gap in tackling digital change. Resistance to change may also come from lack of knowledge and fear of failing in front of new technologies and tools. It is noted that this resistance is not necessarily age/generation-related, and may represent a personal philosophy or mindset.
- ◆ Some misconceptions and concerns regarding the use of digital technologies remain. One common misconception is to equate pedagogical innovation with technological innovation. How to use ICT tools, and how to teach using them, are two intertwined but different matters. Capacity building, training and support are needed for both.
- ◆ There is a general issue of teacher welfare following the pandemic: many staff members are genuinely tired. There is fatigue from coping with teaching at home, or innovating teaching because the situation requires it yet receiving no recognition for it, and having no time for research. Many colleagues just want to return back to “normal”.

Challenge #4

Not enough attention is granted to assessment as an integral part of the curriculum, and to support its due role in constructive alignment.

- ◆ Many regulations or guidelines do not grant much attention to assessment, and as a result, there may be a lack of dedicated reflection on assessment as part of student-centred learning, and of the constructive alignment paradigm.
- ◆ A learning outcome-based, constructive alignment-based approach to curriculum is still a work in progress in many institutions. Institutions and teachers may sometimes still struggle with questions on how to assess all learning outcomes of a course, or how to coherently design assessment.

Challenge #5

Student and teacher assessment literacy need to be (further) developed.

- ◆ Involving students as partners in assessment is a very powerful means of improving curricula and assessments that are student-centred, and support learning.⁶ However, involving students as partners is not an obvious approach, and not widespread enough. Also, there can be very different cultures of student engagement across countries.
- ◆ Giving students agency in choosing what assessment they want in a course requires assessment literacy from both students and teachers, as well as flexibility in the curriculum.
- ◆ Developing students' assessment literacy requires making the effort to diversify assessment methods (summative, formative, synchronous, asynchronous, peer assessment among students, etc.). This needs to be clearly articulated within curricular learning outcomes, and requires the collaboration of all teachers in a study programme.
- ◆ Making students co-creators of assessments and marking criteria will make sure that these can be designed in a format that is clear and accessible to all students. Empowering students to understand the requirements of their assessments is fundamental to student success.
- ◆ The lack of teacher assessment literacy may cause concerns about change.

Recommendations

On the basis of the challenges identified, the group proposes the following recommendations to higher education institutions that engage with DELT in a curricular context.

Recommendation #1

HEIs need to think through the question of equity across the board, with “equity” meaning that there could be multiple channels and possibilities to achieve the same learning outcomes.

Students should be offered equal chances to achieve learning outcomes required in the curriculum. However, equity in the curricular context does not necessarily mean that the curricular experience should be the same for all and for any student. HEIs should strive for inclusiveness, with equitable opportunities offered to students. Concrete ways to achieve this recommendation include:

- a. Embracing **adaptive learning** and an **inclusive curriculum**: reflecting on how to adapt to diverse students, offering them a variety and possibility of choice in engaging with material and resources provided (different media or format), and allowing them to demonstrate their understanding and mastery of contents (choice on how to provide input). This requires offering multiple means of engagement, representation and action/expression. This also requires that teachers be offered proper training on adaptive learning.
- b. Offering ways for **teachers and students to have an impact** on the curriculum: providing opportunities for active engagement in designing and developing curricula – not only for providing feedback or being consulted on predefined plans.

➔ EXAMPLE OF PRACTICE

A useful approach to supporting inclusion, used by some members of the group, was adopting the principles of **Universal Design for Learning**. These principles are an evidence-based approach which emphasises the diversity of learners, both in their backgrounds, physical abilities, and neurological make-up. The key focus of UDL is to embed equity, inclusion and accessibility into the initial development process of curriculum, assessment, activity, resources, and building design for learning. Building in inclusivity in the early stages of design not only provides support for students with specific learning needs, but enhances the educational experience for all students.

➔ EXAMPLE OF PRACTICE

An approach to enhance quality assurance for study programmes was undertaken by **University Côte d’Azur** (France). This approach involved a paradigm shift toward student-centred learning and a learning outcome-based and competency-based approach. The key to this approach was embedding constructive alignment in teacher support and training. The institution collaborated with international partners to develop and share good practices, and develop institutional training packages, and support. This holistic and collaborative approach ensured that experiences and expertise were shared, which attenuated the impact of the paradigm shift in moving to student-centred learning.

Recommendation #2

Effective institutional strategies are necessary to embed digital teaching into the curriculum, coordinated across the institution.

Most HEIs have rules and guidelines related to curriculum design, delivery and assessment. The pandemic has opened a window of opportunities for embracing DELT, yet at the same time opened areas where more or better defined institutional strategies will be needed – such as the balance between on-site, online and hybrid learning, the defining of “flexibility”, and the use of digital platforms. A fine assessment of lessons learnt from the pandemic will most probably take place at HEIs. The group’s recommendation is to take this opportunity for:

- a. Tackling potential improvement in an **evidence-based manner**: conduct an institution-wide evaluation of what works and what does not – including diagnoses from experts in pedagogy and technology, and feedback from end-users (teachers, students, support services). Self-assessment frameworks or tools for devising a digital strategy could be used for this.⁷
- b. Defining **what is expected from teachers** in digital teaching, and making this explicit through institutional and faculty strategies. Expectations needs to go hand in hand with adequate support.
- c. Defining and reaching **a minimal level of common understanding and coordination across the institution** in embedding DELT into the curriculum. This will allow the integration of technology to be communicated and addressed in a comparable/similar way. The basis for this minimal level should address student-centred learning and constructive alignment in a learning outcome-based approach. This is particularly important in large institutions, institutions with many faculties, and those that operate in a highly decentralised way. Examples of practice across faculties should be shared.

🔗 EXAMPLE OF PRACTICE

Koç University (Turkey) adopted an approach to supporting digital teaching methodologies and practices, and guiding faculty members in hands-on practices with digital tools. Digital tools that had been poorly evaluated by users-faculty members and students were replaced and renewed by more effective and efficient ones to enable the institution to bring all technologies together to achieve seamless running of daily teaching and assessment activities in Fall 2020. This ‘broad overview’ approach enabled support to be targeted where it was most needed, and most effective.

Democritus University of Thrace (Greece) identified the training needs of staff using an institution-wide survey to identify skills gaps and resources needed by staff who were facing the move to online learning. The outputs of the survey were used to design a series of training sessions and resources that fitted the specific needs of the staff, and were tailored to them.

A similar approach was undertaken at **Cardiff University** (UK) which developed an institution-wide ‘Digital Education’ project over the summer of 2020, involving over 140 staff and students, to identify the problem areas, and use working groups to develop student and staff training, online resources and guidance, standard procedures, and strategies. The challenge with this approach was ensuring that the different working groups were co-ordinated, and did not duplicate efforts.

Recommendation #3

HEIs need to support and empower teachers to use, experiment and innovate in digital education.

Such support implies staff time and resources, incentives, and community-building, through:

- a. Overcoming discomfort and/or reluctance to **engage with digital tools** that are useful for pedagogy: ensuring that all teachers have the opportunity to get familiarised with digital pedagogies and the appropriate tools to support them, and to gain agency through scaffolding their digital teaching competences. Enhancement can start with training teachers to use simple tools, moving on to encouraging them to experiment with more advanced tools, or innovate with new ones.
- b. Providing **institutional recognition and reward** for dedication to teaching, and teaching development/innovation. Recognition can be in the form of celebrating individual and/or collective accomplishments; recognising those who are taking training; building specific time windows into teachers' schedules to incorporate DELT into their curricula and teaching habits; and recognising "innovation champions" by inviting those who have experimented in digital learning to participate in institutional processes for designing future curricula. Any recognition and reward system should also be set up with the perspective to support teachers' interest and autonomous responsibility in professional development.
- c. Exploring ways to **offer flexibility for experimenting in the curricular context**. Formal processes defining what curriculum should be may not always enable this. A dialogue within and across HEIs, together with regulatory bodies at national level, may be needed. Educators need the freedom to innovate, with the implicit assurance of support if some innovations turn out to be sub-optimal, and may require further revision. Such experimentation should also be research-informed – inspired, for example, by scholarship of teaching and learning, research in education sciences, or action research.
- d. **Supporting those teachers who are at the forefront of bringing DELT into curriculum** and building up a sense of togetherness for them, to be expanded to reach a critical mass of teachers across the institution. Several examples of practice coming from group members can illustrate this recommendation:
 - ♦ Working on the long-term developmental dimension: developing communities of practice or groups of teachers gathering to share experiences

EXAMPLE OF PRACTICE

An approach undertaken by **University of Bologna** (Italy) updated and innovated the tools and digital infrastructure to support learning and teaching. These approaches used innovations, for example, virtual or augmented reality to simulate a portion of reality leading to the performance of a task. Examples of this included Virtual Reality for an immersive virtual operating theatre, or anatomical education using Augmented Reality. This was an example of utilising technologies to address a pedagogical need within a digital/online environment. Students were therefore able to have an authentic experience, despite being in a remote online space.

EXAMPLE OF PRACTICE

University of Minho (Portugal) reimagined their learning and teaching support to a digital format, "IDEA-Digital". This was a programme of written documents, informal sharing sessions, workshops and webinars by local and international experts, each with a particular focus on curriculum or assessment. These activities enabled exemplars of practice to be shared more widely, and provided recognition for those colleagues who were undertaking effective or innovative practices. This means of dissemination therefore builds up a bank of exemplars of effective practices that increases over time into a substantial resource.

EXAMPLE OF PRACTICE

An approach adopted by the **University of Barcelona** (Spain) was the RIMDA-DM programme, to support staff in the transition to blended learning. The programme was an adaptation of an existing staff development programme, which focused on supporting a range of teaching methods in the digital format. Teaching Innovation (TI) teams were formed, involving a wide range of staff with practical teaching experience of the digital methods. These teams developed resources and professional development courses to support other colleagues. Over 140 staff across 15 faculties were involved in the TI teams. This 'grass roots' approach to staff training encouraged other staff to innovate and share good practice.

and provide mutual support. Such communities also operate as “safe spaces” for teachers to reflect together on their teaching, in a peer-learning or ‘critical-friend’ perspective.

- ◆ Peer-advising: having groups of advisors per discipline/study field, and advising only on practices they know or have experimented with, with concrete practical examples.
- ◆ Creating an incentive-based environment for training offers and other support measures.
- ◆ Making sharing within, and among, faculties/departments organic, e.g., by organising cross-faculty events.

Recommendation #4

HEIs need to acknowledge that assessment forms an integral part of the curriculum, and should be reflected upon from the start when designing the curriculum.

In order to fully implement constructive alignment within the curriculum, assessment needs to be designed and incorporated into the curriculum from the beginning, and not at the end of curriculum design. Assessment is a learning activity too, especially in a formative setting, and the same pedagogical care should be dedicated to assessment as a form of learning, and assessment for the support of learning.⁸ This is even more relevant in a context where DELT is embedded into the curriculum, as it may create additional tension between online and face-to-face activities or modalities, especially if both delivery modes are envisaged within the same course. In order to implement this recommendation, HEIs may wish to:

- Analyse the advantages and disadvantages** associated with digital approaches to assessment: e.g., digital tools to increase the inclusivity of assessments and contribute to assessment strategies that can accommodate different learning needs; issues related to integrity in the context of digital summative assessments; etc.
- Streamline syllabus formats** across the institution, so that language and terms used to define learning outcomes are similar, and syllabus profiles better explain the objectives of courses and related assessment to students.
- Design of an assessment framework for a course of study should be **undertaken early in the planning of the curriculum** of that course. Ideally the aims of the assessments, and their format, should be decided when determining the overall learning outcomes of the course, so that the assessment maintains constructive alignment with the syllabus content.
- Develop workplace-related assessments and other **authentic** (i.e., real-life) **assessments** to sustain motivation and develop work-related skills. Collaboration with potential employers is useful to make such assessments directly relevant to the needs of the profession, and the criteria for employers recruiting graduates in the future.

EXAMPLE OF PRACTICE

Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED) (Spain) needed to create training to help teachers design effective online exams, regarding both technical aspects and pedagogical aspects. This was done by creating a series of courses and online materials for staff focusing on online evaluation, as well as a collaborative open source portal with other institutions. These resources helped guide educators in the design of effective and robust online assessments, and had a positive impact on student outcomes. The key factor in this approach was providing support for the design of the assessments, so that the challenges of online assessment were addressed before the assessment was delivered to students.

EXAMPLE OF PRACTICE

Karaganda Medical University (Kazakhstan) adopted an online assessment approach to address the challenge of not being able to run practical medical exams in a face-to-face manner. The institution addressed the change to online assessment by the introduction of ‘open book’ assessments. This proved effective, but also required robust measures to be put in place (such as plagiarism checks) to avoid academic malpractice. This experience highlighted the importance of building in robust approaches to academic integrity in both student communications, and the set-up of assessments.

Recommendation #5

Students and teachers need to be trained and develop their assessment literacy.

HEIs should actively support the development of assessment literacy for both students and teaching staff, to reach a shared understanding of what assessment is for, how it can encourage and enhance the learning experience, and how they can use it to maximise learning. This is even more important in a DELT context, as the digital mode creates more possibilities and formats for assessment. Enhancing assessment literacy also means shifting from a grade- or score-based approach to a learning outcome-based approach. Assessment thus becomes a learning activity, involving students and teachers in different configurations (not only teacher-student, but also peer assessment among students, for instance). This entails:

- a. Specific attention to **assessment in teachers' training and continued professional development (CPD)**: Reforming assessment practices demands considerable effort and teacher training for this purpose. One example of practice is creating training opportunities for staff to develop transformation plans for their assessments, with the support of peers and student tutors. Another example is conducting conversations with teachers on how students can be valuable partners in developing assessment. Training in the potential of online or e-assessment tools is important to embed, to future-proof courses.
- b. Increasing the **active involvement of students** in assessment matters, such as the design, review, and revision of assessment processes. Teachers could also guide and teach students in doing peer evaluations and self-evaluations⁹ as a means of developing self-regulation and self-evaluation skills. Active engagement with employers is also important to align authentic learning with authentic assessments, and with the necessary skills expected from graduates.
- c. Investigating the potential **for students to develop agency in choosing how they want to be assessed**. Flexibility in this choice supports and promotes inclusive and equitable assessment. An informed choice in this regard also implies that technical possibilities offered by assessments in a DELT environment should be clear to all students. However, too much autonomy can also make students anxious if they were not used to it; support and gradual scaffolding are needed.
- d. Shifting the focus from preventing cheating and plagiarism towards **promoting and making explicit what academic integrity is**, notably by:
 - ◆ emphasising the educational benefit to the student of proper academic conduct;
 - ◆ establishing what is and is not acceptable as academic practice (e.g., coincidence vs plagiarism);
 - ◆ defining and identifying plagiarism from the earliest years of study;
 - ◆ making clear, through assessment questions, what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it;
 - ◆ training for properly referencing/quoting as part of academic practice, as a transversal learning outcome to be acquired across all courses, and in a way that students master it for any course;
 - ◆ designing assessment activities that reduce the potential for students to use plagiarism as a strategy.

EXAMPLE OF PRACTICE

Engaging students in the design and revision of assessments helps align these assessments with the needs of students. Two group members, **Cardiff University** (UK) and the **University of Minho** (Portugal), are partners in an Erasmus+ project ('EAT-Erasmus') which uses the '[EAT Framework](#)' to provide practical activities for students and staff to enhance student and staff assessment literacy, student-centred feedback, and design of assessments that are fully aligned with the needs of the discipline. This evidence-informed framework can be used to identify areas that need to be developed, and to engage students actively in understanding the assessment process.

The large-scale shift to online or distance assessment activities (especially online examinations) as a result of the pandemic, makes this requirement to embed academic integrity even more urgent. Remote assessments are difficult to invigilate, and so the design of assessments that encourage application, rather than recitation, of material, is an important approach to adopt.

Conclusions

In their work, the group addressed digital learning and teaching in the curriculum, including assessment, through the lens of an equitable journey into higher education. However, it is also clear that a number of conditions play a role in how such an equitable journey can take place. In the first place, and as discussed across several EUA Thematic Peer Groups in the past, teachers nowadays face multiple tasks and demands related to the academic profession, and there is deep imparity of esteem for teaching compared to other missions such as research. Any recommendation for improving the curriculum should be read against the background of further effort needed for learning and teaching, and of the proper value and recognition being given to these efforts, including through career progression for teachers.

Lastly, when the work of the group started, in Spring 2021, there was hope that, after the academic year 2020-2021, higher education would evolve in a post-Covid world. Discussions could then revolve around maximising lessons learnt and mapping benefits of DELT during this crisis. However, as time has passed, it has become clear that the pandemic is not ending yet. Rethinking the curriculum means continuously reflecting on what “flexibility” means, how to accommodate it in a continued crisis management flow, and how to anticipate the next crisis. The group hopes that the recommendations from this report will give pause to reflect on what can be done for DELT in a curricular context, based on the emergency teaching experience from 2020-2021.

Annexes

ANNEX 1: GLOSSARY

During their discussions, group members observed that there may be differences in the way terms that may appear commonly understood, are actually used in different contexts. In order to avoid any misinterpretation of their recommendations, the group proposes a brief glossary.

Adaptive learning: A curriculum or learning activity which has sufficient flexibility of approach to be accessible to all students, regardless of their background, disability, diversity, or resource availability.

Assessment as learning: The use of assessment as an integral part of the learning process, to help develop academic or critical skills, or to deliver or explain the taught content of a curriculum whilst also assessing students' competencies. Typically an assessment approach that requires the student to research information, or develop a skill as part of the assessment.

Assessment for learning: The use of assessment to help support and drive the learning process. For example, formative assessments that enable the student to gauge their progress or to learn through failure, without it impacting their grade. Typically an approach that encourages the student and facilitates their learning through the use of an assessment.

Assessment Literacy: The understanding (by student or staff) of the full purpose and potential of assessment, and how best to use assessment and feedback to help and support learning.

Assessment of learning: The use of assessment to audit a student's competence, knowledge level, or understanding. Typically an assessment that focuses on what the student has learned in a retrospective manner, such as an examination.

Asynchronous activity: A learning activity which occurs outside of a taught session – for example preparatory work before a class, or additional activities to supplement in-class learning.

Blended Learning: An educational approach that utilises both face-to-face and digital approaches together, for delivery of the curriculum or assessment, and for student interactions and support.

Constructive alignment¹⁰: The clear co-ordination between the learning aims, or learning outcomes for a course of study, and the aims and purposes of the assessment used to evaluate the learning on that course.

Formative assessment: Assessment that does not contribute to the student's mark or grade for a course. Formative assessment provides the student with a no-risk opportunity to attempt an assessment in order to gauge the level of their learning or competence.

Hybrid learning¹¹: Often used synonymously with Blended Learning. The synthesis of face-to-face and online learning activities.

Inclusive curriculum: A curriculum and/or assessment format which ensures that all students can perform to their optimum potential, regardless of their background, disability, diversity, socioeconomic status, or resource availability.

Self-regulation: The ability of a learner to manage their own learning, in terms of their learning strategies, their motivations, and how they organise their time. Self-regulation in assessment involves the development of the ability to be able to evaluate one's own work, without the need of a teacher to provide feedback.

Students as partners or Student partnership: The involvement of students as active co-designers of and co-contributors to new curricula or assessments, rather than restricting their role to providing feedback on pre-determined approaches or activities. Involving students in the development process has the potential to help develop learning activities that are student-centred, and aligned with student expectations, from the outset.

Summative assessment: Assessment that contributes a mark or grade that will count towards the student's course grade or degree result.

Synchronous activity: Learning activities that occur within a scheduled teaching session, and are usually facilitated by the teacher.

ANNEX 2: EUA LEARNING & TEACHING THEMATIC PEER GROUPS

As part of its work on learning and teaching, EUA engages with leadership and professional staff overseeing or implementing learning and teaching activities at the institutional level. Coordinating the work of a set of Thematic Peer Groups is a key aspect of EUA's work in connecting with university communities. The groups consist of university representatives selected through a call for participation; the core of their remit is to:

- discuss and explore practices and lessons learnt in organising and implementing learning and teaching in European universities;
- contribute to the enhancement of learning and teaching by identifying key recommendations on the selected theme.

The 2021 Thematic Peer Groups were organised as part of the [DIGI-HE project](#) with a focus on digitally enhanced learning and teaching (DELT). The Thematic Peer Groups, active from March 2021 until February 2022, facilitated discussion among group members through their engagement in peer-learning exercises and exchange of experience. Similarly, the group members contributed their expertise to develop EUA's input in policy debates, such as the Bologna Process.

Each group was chaired by a member representative from one university and supported by two coordinators – one from within the EUA Secretariat and another from within the DIGI-HE Consortium. The groups met in several online meetings organised throughout 2021 and despite challenges presented by the virtual setting, were successful in identifying the major issues related to all three themes – strategy and organisational culture, curriculum and assessment, and international partnerships.

Each group discussed the key challenges related to its respective theme; explored ways to overcome challenges through innovative practices and approaches, and drew conclusions as regards institutional policies and processes that would support the enhancement of learning and teaching. In addition, the groups served as platform for members to put forward and discuss other issues relevant to the theme. Members of the groups also presented the outcomes at the 2022 European Learning & Teaching Forum, with the objective of obtaining feedback on the groups' conclusions and recommendations.

Composition of the Thematic Peer Group 'Curriculum and assessment'

(starting with the group chair, then proceeding by alphabetical order of the country name):

- **Cardiff University (United Kingdom)**
 - Stephen Rutherford, Institutional Academic Lead for Professional Development in learning and teaching (chair)
- **University of Côte-d'Azur (France)**
 - Stéphane Azoulay, Vice-President for Education
 - Virginie Oddo, Director of the Service for Development
 - Nathalie Oriol, Associate Professor and Programme Manager
 - Natalia Timus, Head of Academic Development
- **Democritus University of Thrace (Greece)**
 - Zoe Gavriilidou, Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs and Student Welfare
- **University of Bologna (Italy)**
 - Elena Luppi, Rector's Delegate for Innovation in Learning and Teaching
- **Karaganda Medical University (Kazakhstan)**
 - Viktor Riklefs, Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs
- **University of Minho (Portugal)**
 - Manuel Joao Costa, Pro-Rector for Pedagogical Innovation and Student Affairs
 - Duarte Lopes, student

- **University of Barcelona (Spain)**
 - Fermin Huarte, Vice-Dean for Academic Affairs and Quality, Faculty of Chemistry
- **Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED) (Spain)**
 - Nancy Anne Konvalinka, Vice-Rector for Academic Coordination and Quality
 - Francisco Javier Casielles Garcia, student
- **Koç University (Turkey)**
 - Zuhale Zeybekođlu, Manager of the Koç University Office of Learning and Teaching
 - Jale Günbak Hatil, PhD candidate and Training Assistant Specialist
- **National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy (Ukraine)**
 - Olha Bershadaska, Head of the Center for Quality Assurance of Education
 - Oleksandr Poddenezhnyi, Head of the E-learning Center
- **Coordinators:** Thérèse Zhang, Deputy Director for Higher Education Policy, EUA and Ulf-Daniel Ehlers, Vice-President, Baden-Württemberg Cooperative State University (DHBW), Germany

Endnotes

- 1 The contents of this report were first presented during a focus group that took place at the 2022 European Learning & Teaching Forum. The group would like to thank the participants of the focus group for their feedback and further input.
- 2 Biggs, J. and Tang, C., 2011, *Teaching for Quality Learning and University* (4th edition) (Buckingham, Open University Press/McGraw Hill).
- 3 A previous Thematic Peer Group organised by EUA in 2019 specifically addressed the topic of evidence-based learning and teaching. Their report is available [here](#). There are also a [podcast](#) and a [video capsule](#) available.
- 4 Friedlander, M. J., Andrews, L., Armstrong, E. G., Aschenbrenner, C., Kass, J. S., Ogden, P., Schwartzstein, R., and Viggiano, T. R., 2011, "What can medical education learn from the neurobiology of learning?", *Academic Medicine: Journal of the Association of Medical Colleges*, 86(4), 415-420.
- 5 This point should also be seen in the wider context of higher education reforms across the European Higher Education Area: the [Bologna Process Implementation Reports](#), for instance, have repeatedly emphasised the need to improve assessment in the uptake and implementation of student-centred learning. Likewise, there is an effort in several countries to improve assessment and the quality of assessment (e.g. work undertaken by Advance HE in the UK), while respecting institutional autonomy.
- 6 Gravett, K., Kinchin, I. M., and Winstone, N. E., 2020, 'More than customers': conceptions of students as partners held by students, staff, and institutional leaders. *Studies in Higher Education*, 45(12), 2574-2587.
- 7 Volungevičienė, A., Brown, M., Greenspon, R., Gaebel, M. and Morrisroe, A., 2021, *Developing a high performance digital education ecosystem. Institutional self-assessment instruments* (Brussels, European University Association). Accessed <https://www.eua.eu/resources/publications/953:developing-a-high-performance-digital-education-ecosystem.html> (20/12/2021).
- 8 Montgomery, C. Sambell, K., and McDowell, L., 2012, *Assessment for Learning in Higher Education* (Abingdon, Routledge), and Yan, Z. and Yang, L. (Eds.), 2021, *Assessment as Learning: Maximising Opportunities for Student Learning and Achievement* (Abingdon, Routledge).
- 9 Evans, C., and Waring M., 2020, 'Enhancing students' assessment feedback skills within higher education', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education* (Oxford, Oxford University Press). <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.932>
- 10 Biggs, J., 1996, 'Enhancing teaching through constructive alignment'. *Higher Education* 32, 347-364.
- 11 O'Byrne, W.I., and Pytash, K.E., 2015, 'Hybrid and Blended Learning: Modifying Pedagogy Across Path, Pace, Time, and Place' *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 59(2). <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.463>

The European University Association (EUA) is the representative organisation of universities and national rectors' conferences in 48 European countries. EUA plays a crucial role in the Bologna Process and in influencing EU policies on higher education, research and innovation. Thanks to its interaction with a range of other European and international organisations, EUA ensures that the voice of European universities is heard wherever decisions are being taken that will impact their activities.

The Association provides unique expertise in higher education and research as well as a forum for exchange of ideas and good practice among universities. The results of EUA's work are made available to members and stakeholders through conferences, seminars, websites and publications.

This paper, prepared within the framework of the EUA-led DIGI-HE project, is one of a series of reports specifically focused on learning and teaching. It is designed to gather the knowledge and experiences of experts on the topic from across Europe. EUA's activities in learning and teaching aim at enhancing the quality and relevance of higher education provision, underline the importance of learning and teaching as a core mission and advocate for learning and teaching activities to be geared towards student learning and success.