Guidance Note: *Technology-Enhanced Learning*

What does technology-enhanced learning encompass?

Higher education is delivered in many ways, including through the use of a diversity of technologies such as multimedia, video and online conferencing tools, podcasting, chat rooms, and dedicated learning management systems. Technology-enhanced learning (TEL) is a generic term for modes of course delivery that include such elements, and their use is sometimes also referred to as 'e-learning'

TEL is not a term used in the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015* (HES Framework), but in this context it is interpreted broadly as any learning that occurs through the application of electronic communications and computer-based educational technology, combined with pedagogical principles and practices that are applicable to and tailored for this purpose. This might range from augmenting face-to-face teaching with TEL in a limited way, through 'blended delivery' (with a more equal mix of the two) to fully 'online' delivery.

The HES Framework does not presuppose or prescribe any particular mode of delivery or participation.

Relevant Standards in the HES Framework

The Standards primarily related to TEL are those that apply to any other mode of delivery or participation, although their application and emphasis may differ in a TEL environment.

By way of illustration, e-learners may require specific skills that might be reflected in tailored admission criteria (e.g. Section 1.1) and an TEL mode of delivery may affect how a provider offers transitional support and detects students at risk (see Section 1.3). The HES Framework specifically requires (Standard 1.3.6) that students have equivalent opportunities for successful transition into and progression through their course of study, irrespective of their educational background, entry pathway, or mode or place of study. Specification and validation of some types of learning outcomes (Section 1.4) that might normally be assessed on-site might need to be related to the learning environment.

There are also specific requirements in the Standards:

- concerning access to electronic information (Standard 2.1.2)

- for supporting interactions among students outside of formal teaching (Standard 2.1.3) such as group work

- for safety and support services (Section 2.3), and

- for access to learning resources and educational support, and for maintaining contact with off-campus students (Section 3.3).

The requirements for course design (Section 3.1) will need to take into account pedagogical principles that are consistent with the needs of learners and TEL, and there are implications for teaching staff in so far as they need to be equipped for a TEL role (see e.g. Standard 3.2.3). Policies relating to academic integrity (Section 5.2) need to apply to the particular challenges posed in the TEL environment. Policies for the granting of credit (see Section 1.2) must also apply to new forms of prior learning in the TEL environment, such as completion of a MOOC or micro-credential. Again, the Standards concerned with information and representation of offerings (see Sections 7.1-7.3) apply equally to TEL offerings.

The preceding paragraphs are an illustrative rather than exhaustive listing of particular emphases and challenges for meeting the requirements of the HES Framework in a TEL environment. Providers will need to explore the application of the Standards of the HES Framework in their particular circumstances.

Providers should also note that the *National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2007* (the National Code)[1] places restrictions on the extent of TEL that can be undertaken by international students studying in Australia on a student visa.

Intent of the Standards

The intent of the Standards is to ensure that TEL delivers high quality education, positive student experiences and credible qualifications, in the same way as other modes of delivery and participation.

Providers should note that the requirements of the HES Framework must be met and continue to be met irrespective of the modes of delivery and participation adopted by a provider.

Risks to Quality

TEL offers many potential benefits to students providers and teaching staff, and does not pose a higher level of risk overall than any other form of delivery. However, it can pose some particular risks to the quality of education and/or student experiences (especially where courses are delivered wholly or mainly through TEL) including where:

4   a provider has insufficient expertise to develop, approve and deliver courses of study involving TEL

4   the design of a course of study is predicated disproportionately on using technology for its own sake rather than on relevant pedagogical principles that are appropriate to TEL

4   the expected learning outcomes are not achievable and/or validly assessable in the e-learning environment

4   the TEL materials and content used do not reflect the learning needs of the students involved and/or the level of education (e.g. materials bought in from other programs with incompatible purposes and outcomes)

4   the learning and support needs of e-learners are not sufficiently understood or addressed

---

[1] The National Code was under review at the time of writing this guidance note.

- 4 students are not provided with access to, or sufficient access to, learning support, individual tuition, their student peers and other support mechanisms

- 4 students who are, or may be at risk, are not identified

- 4 there are insufficient and/or ineffective mechanisms for students to work collaboratively to achieve learning outcomes as required

- 4 there are unreasonable barriers to accessing essential technology or other resources, or students are not adequately informed about access and required resources prior to course commencement

- 4 teaching staff are not equipped for their role in TEL

- 4 credit is granted for previous learning (including TEL) that is of doubtful integrity, or that does not integrate with the learning outcomes of the course as a whole

- 4 impediments and success factors in the TEL environment are not understood or addressed, or

- 4 the provider's learning/information systems are not secure and risk lapses in academic integrity, including cheating and plagiarism.

What TEQSA will look for

This part of the guidance note covers the full extent of the Standards, and corresponding evidence that TEQSA may require, in relation to Technology-Enhanced Learning.

For new applicants seeking initial registration and course accreditation, TEQSA will require evidence to be provided in relation to all relevant Standards.

For existing providers, the scope of Standards to be assessed and the evidence required may vary. This is consistent with the regulatory principles in the TEQSA Act, under which TEQSA has discretion to vary the scope of its assessments and the related evidence required. In exercising this discretion, TEQSA will be guided by the provider's regulatory history, its risk profile and its track record in delivering high quality higher education.

TEQSA's case managers will discuss with providers the scope of assessments and evidence required well ahead of the due date for submitting an application.

The evidence required for particular types of application is available from the Application Guides on the TEQSA website.

TEQSA does not have a predetermined position on the modes of delivery and participation that providers might adopt. Indeed, TEQSA welcomes diversity and innovation within higher education. However, if a provider adopts TEL, TEQSA will need to be satisfied that the requirements of the HES Framework are met and will continue to be met, as they must be with any other chosen mode of delivery and participation.

A provider will need to demonstrate that it has the necessary pedagogical and technical expertise to use TEL in relation to:

- 4 the design of the course of study
- 4 the specification and assessment of learning outcomes, delivery and staffing, and
- 4 the maintenance of academic integrity.

TEQSA will also wish to see that there are sufficient learning resources and appropriate mechanisms to offer academic support consistent with the needs of particular student cohorts, especially those that do not attend classes on campus. For example, mature-age students admitted on the basis of professional experience may or may not have the prior experience needed for academic study online without face-to-face support, and international students may need language support and orientation to new study approaches. Where credit has been or is to be granted on the basis of prior TEL, TEQSA will need to be confident that such TEL (as with any other form of prior learning) is credible and authentic, and relates to the learning outcomes of the course as a whole.

The learning environment will need to address the requirements of the Standards for student wellbeing irrespective of the mode of participation. This includes maintenance of regular contact with students who are not on campus, and the provision of opportunities for on-line students to interact with their peers. TEQSA will need to be satisfied that all students have an equivalent chance of success, irrespective of their mode or place of study, and that the provider has evidence of student progress not only overall, but also by mode of delivery.

Resources and references

Australian Council on Open, Distance and e-Learning (ACODE), Publications and Resources (including ACODE Benchmarks), <http://www.acode.edu.au>.

Australian Government, *National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2007,* <https://www.legislation.gov.au/>.

Australian Government, *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000,* <https://www.legislation.gov.au/>.

International Association for Distance Learning, a range of quality standards <e.g. http://www.iadl.org.uk/QualityAssurance.htm> for TEL as well as technical standards for publishing and delivering e-learning materials.

Office for Learning and Teaching Resource Library[2], <http://www.olt.gov.au/resources/good-practice>.

TEQSA (2016), *Explanations of terms in Part A of the HES Framework 2015,* <http://www.teqsa.gov.au/explanations-hes-framework-terms>.

TEQSA (2016), Guidance Notes on *Credit and Recognition of Prior Learning and Course Design* and on *Learning Outcomes and Assessment,* <http://www.teqsa.gov.au/hesf-2015-specific-guidance-notes>.

---

[2] This library contains a collection of higher education learning and teaching materials flowing from projects funded by the Commonwealth of Australia, including those from the Australian Learning and Teaching Council.

Version #	Date	Key changes
1.0	19 August 2016	Made available as beta version for consultation. Replaces previous information sheet on 'e-Learning'.