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# Digital Learning and Teaching Framework

Part A – Framework

Part B – Purpose and Scope

Part C – Components of the Framework

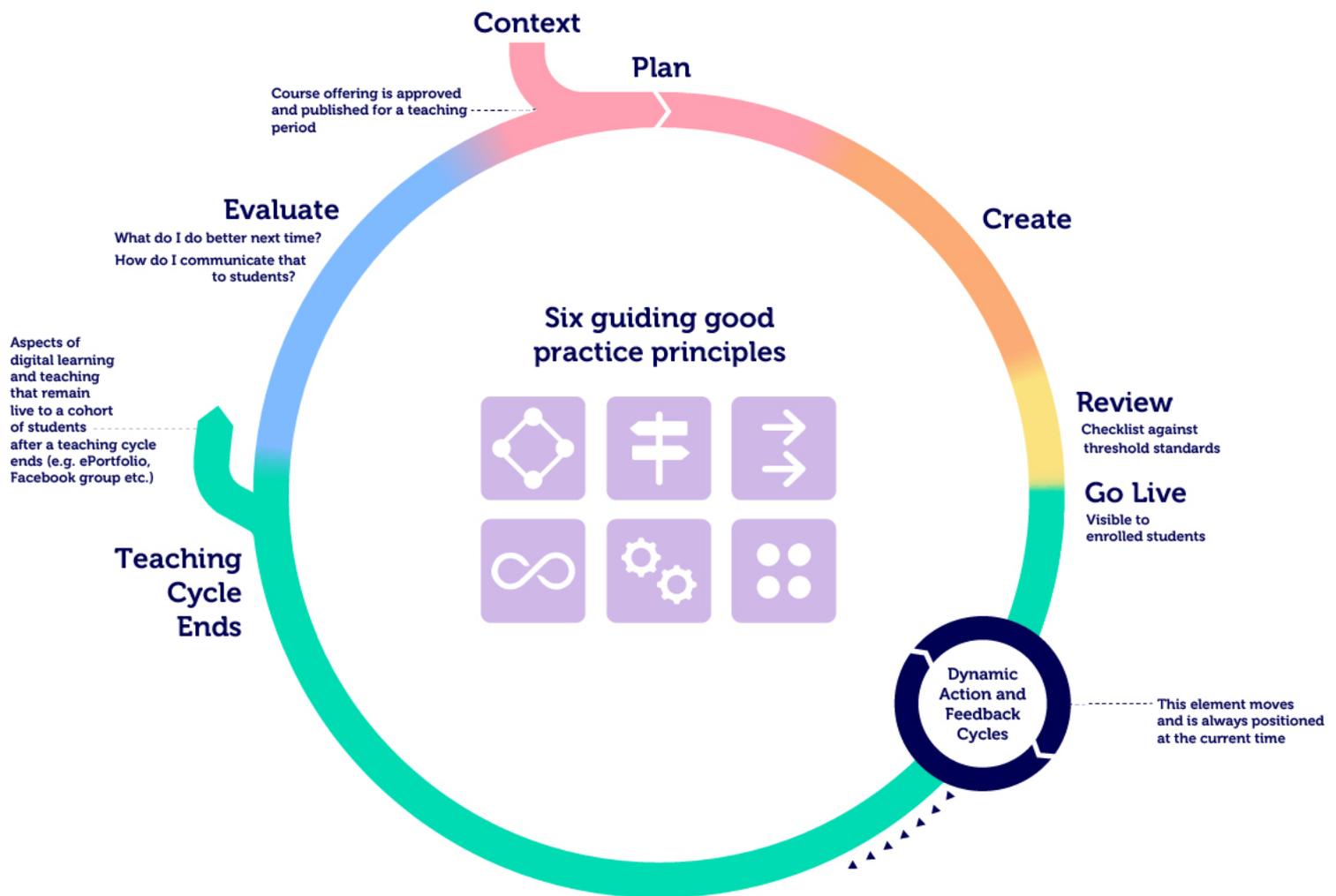
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# Digital Learning and Teaching Framework

## Course Production and Delivery Cycle



## Institutional Guidance

### Six guiding good practice principles



### Threshold standards for online course environments

Course design and course shell  
Welcome and course information  
Orientation and getting started  
Learning outcome and course objectives  
Assessment and feedback  
Learning resources  
Learning activities, engagement and alignment  
Technology and online tools  
Support for learning  
Usability and W3C Compliance

### Style guide for online course environments

Branding  
Writing conventions  
Copyright  
Presentation of text content  
Presentation of static images, graphics and non-text content  
Presentation of non-interactive multimedia  
Presentation of interactive media  
Accessibility

### Good practice guidelines

Exemplars  
Templates  
Technology user guides  
Pedagogical models  
Evidence-based resources

## Part B - Purpose and Scope of the Framework

This document presents a *Digital Learning and Teaching Framework* for RMIT University. The purpose of the framework is to assist staff and students across the University to use digital platforms to meet the learning and teaching aspirations in RMIT's [strategic plan](#) as well as core [legislative requirements](#).

The framework has been developed to support the implementation of Canvas Learning Management Systems (LMS), but positions 'digital learning' within an ecosystem that includes the LMS, other digital platforms, face-to-face teaching, industry/workplace learning and other environments. Put simply, digital learning and teaching is seen as part of a broader set of activities focused on delivering outstanding learning and teaching.

The *Digital Learning and Teaching Framework* emphasises the *doing* of digital learning and teaching. The framework is underpinned by policy and evidence from within and outside RMIT but is not a literature review. Instead, the framework aims to support the activities of teaching staff and other stakeholders in a streamlined way by translating key lessons from the policy and research into concise, adoptable practices.

The *Digital Learning and Teaching Framework* is intended to support good practice across the whole of RMIT. It is not specific to discipline or Australian Qualifications Framework level, rather it assumes that program teams, Schools and Colleges, with their own embedded support groups and approaches, will work together to meet the threshold standards - and pursue exemplary practice - using learning designs that are appropriate to their context. The framework emphasises consistency, not sameness.

The *Digital Learning and Teaching Framework* is a model and set of artefacts that support staff to creatively leverage digital platforms so that RMIT's institutional practices assure students of a quality learning experience.

## Part C - Components of the Framework

The Digital Learning and Teaching Framework has four components that will be described in the following pages:

- Learning and Teaching Context
- Process (Course Production and Delivery Cycle)
- Digital Learning Ecosystem
- Institutional Guidance

### Context

The context component of the framework can be used by stakeholders to attune themselves to RMIT's aspirations and legal obligations with respect to digital learning and teaching.

As will be discussed shortly, the primary process that this framework is concerned with is the *course production and delivery cycle*. This means that the framework is intended to articulate the context in which individual courses are produced and delivered.

### External regulatory requirements

As a registered Higher Education and Vocational Education provider RMIT University is expected to adhere to regulatory standards and requirements.

As a starting point, the Australian Qualifications Framework ([AQF](#)) outlines the level of learning achievement that is required to receive an award at each of the different levels across the VE and HE spectrum.

After the AQF, the regulatory context separates out VE and HE. For Vocational Education, this means complying with Australian Skills Quality Agency ([ASQA](#)) regulations and auditing processes. The Higher Education equivalent is the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency ([TEQSA](#)), which audits against the Higher Education Standards Framework ([HESF](#)).

Part of the role of this framework is to identify the regulatory requirements that are specific to digital learning and teaching and make these explicit. This illustrates the importance of the *threshold standards for online course environments*.

### RMIT's Strategic Context

The *Ready for Life and Work* strategic plan set out RMIT's core aspirations to 2020. Digital learning and teaching is central the following three:

1. A transformative learning experience, which among other things is inclusive, user friendly, collaborative and characterised by inspiring teaching.
2. Provision of learning (in a learning environment) that will enable students to flourish in industry and enterprise.
3. A digital infrastructure that supports everything that we do.

To assist with achieving these objectives RMIT is in the process of implementing Canvas, a new LMS. The implementation of Canvas provides an opportunity to redefine and consolidate what good digital learning and teaching is at RMIT University, especially in the context of a contemporary learning ecosystem with Canvas at the core.

## **RMIT Course and Program Design Policy and Procedures**

RMIT has a suite of policies and procedures that guide program and course design activities. The overarching policy is the *program and course design policy*, which contains both the *course design procedure* and the *program design procedure*.

The [program design procedure](#) provide guidance around 27 different themes to help ensure programs are designed appropriately with respect to things like accessibility, award level, pathways, dual degrees, work-integrated learning, research, capstone experience and more.

The [course design procedure](#) addresses:

- Key definitions
- Use of stakeholder feedback and quality assurance data in course design
- Standard course sizes and systems for defining volume of learning
- Course guides
- Assessment in course guides
- Requirement of early assessment with prompt feedback in introductory courses (coursework programs)
- Course requisites
- Different locations, delivery modes and courses involving travel
- Course and class configuration.

## **Program Context**

Program context relates to the relationship between a course and the programs that students studying that course are enrolled in. The focus here is less on policy and more on how the courses that students take contribute collectively to students' overall learning experience at RMIT.

In this sense, the program context relates to things like:

- The program learning outcomes that courses are expected to contribute to
- Timing of different learning activities (particularly assessment)
- Work-integrated learning commitments for students
- Delivery location
- Professional accreditation requirements
- Status of the course as a core or elective offering
- The modes of learning that students can enrol in
- Which program teams are responsible for course planning
- What type of digital technology is available to staff and students in the discipline/program
- What support is available for digital learning and teaching for staff and students.

There are many further connections between courses and programs that set the context for the teaching of a course in a given teaching period. The key message is that the ways programs and

courses interact for students plays a key role in whether their learning is *clear, consistent, aligned, inclusive, dynamic* and *connected*, which are the six guiding principles for digital learning and teaching that are part of the institutional guidance component of the framework.

### **Course Context**

Course context is about clarifying the scope of a course as an offering. This starts with the basic decision of whether a course is offered for delivery in a particular teaching period. Once a course is an approved and scheduled offering, the course guide is published, which details the course learning outcomes and some basic parameters for how the teaching will take place.

Once published, the course guide becomes a reference point for all of the planning, creating, review, delivery and evaluation that follows in that teaching period.

## Course Production and Delivery Cycle (Process)

The process component situates digital learning and teaching in the context of a generalised *course production and delivery cycle*. This is because courses are:

- simple, well-defined units of learning with explicit learning objectives and teaching periods;
- the level at which LMS sites are most commonly generated;
- likely to have the broadest applicability to stakeholders and work groups across RMIT; and,
- a key focus of feedback, evaluation and improvement initiatives at RMIT.

The processes through which digital learning and teaching experiences are produced and delivered are likely to be more dynamic than can be expressed in a generic model. The framework encourages stakeholders to view the *course production and delivery cycle* as a guide and an approximation rather than a prescriptive, universal model.

If this common-sense approach is adopted, the value of the process component is that it highlights where different guidance elements are likely to be of most use. From a Quality Assurance perspective, for example, the period immediately before course materials become visible to enrolled students is an ideal time to review against the threshold standards. For program teams, particular exemplars in the good practice guide might be used in the planning phase to identify possible ways in which the course might be refined based on student feedback.

In the framework, the *course design and production cycle* is seen as having five stages:

1. Plan
2. Create
3. Review
4. Go Live (Delivery)
5. Evaluate

### Plan

The plan stage begins prior to the end of one teaching period and transitions into a new teaching period, with the exception being courses offered for the first time.

At the end of a teaching period planning is about identifying when (and if) a course will next be offered and ensuring the appropriate administrative tasks are allocated and completed to have the course offering approved and published.

The commencement of the new teaching period begins with more planning. This might involve:

- reflecting on feedback from the previous teaching period.
- appointing teaching staff, contacting any industry partners.
- linking with academic developers and learning advisors.
- looking at any assessment timing issues (such as multiple major assignments in different courses being due on the same day).
- considering how to respond to any changes to the digital learning and teaching context.

## **Create**

The create stage relates to the preparatory work that is typically carried out prior to a teaching period. This might include developing new resources, rolling over and updating the LMS site, swapping out dated resources with contemporary ones, designing new lesson and activity plans incorporating feedback from students and many other activities.

The create stage is not just limited to teaching staff. Service groups (e.g. Study and Learning Centre or Library) may be involved in preparing resources for the coming teaching period. Similarly, academic developers and learning advisors may work with course and program teams to implement a certain pedagogical approach or develop resources.

## **Review**

Whilst it would be expected that digital learning and teaching is reviewed and refined during any given teaching period, the framework explicitly acknowledges that the period before course material is made visible to students is a key point where a review should be carried out to make sure the course meets relevant standards and regulatory requirements. Ideally, the threshold standards would be used as the basis for this review in conjunction with any discipline specific criteria for releasing a course to students.

## **Go Live**

The go live stage begins when the enrolled cohort of students first gain access to course materials and for the most part continues until the end of the teaching period. Notably, nature of digital learning and teaching is such that students may continue engaging with digital platforms well after a course has been completed, as might be the case with ePortfolios or social media groups, for example. In short, the go live phase might continue in some form well after the formal assessment for a course has been completed.

## **Evaluate**

The evaluate stage of the cycle relates to the summative evaluation of the digital learning and teaching of a course, which may be carried out using a range of methods. These might include student feedback (e.g. Course Experience Survey), self-assessment, peer review, program and/or course team review or a scheduled quality assurance review.

## **Dynamic action and feedback cycles**

The above five-stage cycle represents a relatively static view of a course production and delivery period. In practice, digital learning and teaching is a much more dynamic and unpredictable activity that needs to be responsive to student needs and feedback as well as both planned and unforeseen changes in context (e.g. one or more members of teaching team may get sick or new digital equipment or spaces may become available).

The framework recognises that in learning the most important activity is often whatever is happening at the present time. As such, an element has been included in the framework that is the current activity indicator. This element can be thought of as representing the work being carried out various stakeholders at the present moment. It travels around the *course and delivery production cycle*. Whilst there are many digital learning activities that students, teachers and other stakeholders are juggling at any given time, the framework expresses these as a constant process of reflection and action.

## Digital Learning Ecosystem

The Digital Learning Ecosystem component of the framework helps stakeholders to understand the digital ecosystem that can be leveraged for learning and teaching at RMIT. For the purposes of this framework there are five key elements:

1. Users
2. Hardware
3. Firmware/software
4. Networks
5. Spaces

The term users describes the wide variety of people (and work groups) involved in digital learning and teaching at RMIT University. Core user groups include students, teaching staff, industry, academic developers and learning advisors, service group staff and management.

### Hardware

Hardware refers to the physical components of the learning ecosystem and includes many different types of digital devices. Hardware includes the standard multi-functional computer and mobile devices, as well as more specialised and/or discipline specific digital equipment.

### Firmware/software

Firmware and software are essentially application programs that enable the physical potential of devices to be translated into actual functionality. Typically, firmware refers to a basic program that allows a digital machine to run - either as a standalone operating system (e.g. digital SLR camera) or by booting an operating system (e.g. Windows; iOS). In contrast, software refers to a set of non-essential user programs that can be run, or are running, on a system, which can be updated, deleted or customised as required.

Within the digital learning and teaching ecosystem it is important to consider the role of Canvas, particularly with reference to its relationship to the various external applications that are used for teaching across disciplines, activities or pedagogical approaches. Canvas can be thought of as a hub that uses the Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI) standard to connect with external applications. LTI is explained by IMS Global<sup>1</sup> (2017) below:

*“The basic use case behind the development of the LTI specification is to allow the seamless connection of web-based, externally hosted applications and content (from simple communication applications like chat, to domain-specific learning environments for complex subjects like math or science) with platforms that present them to users.*

*In other words, if you have an interactive assessment application or virtual chemistry lab, it can be securely connected to an educational platform in a standard way without having to develop and maintain custom integrations for each platform and tool.”*

The implication for the *Digital Learning and Teaching Framework* is that external applications can be classified according to three levels:

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.imsglobal.org/activity/learning-tools-interoperability>

1. Tools that are currently interoperable with Canvas at RMIT wither via LTI or using some other method (there are presently over 250 of these using LTI).
2. Tools that are interoperable with Canvas, but that are not currently interoperable (or enabled) at RMIT.
3. Tools that are not currently interoperable with Canvas.

## **Networks**

The digital ecosystem is also comprised of networks, which allow resources to be shared across between hardware, and by association, hardware users.

## **Spaces**

The environment in which digital learning and teaching takes place can offer its own set of hindrances or affordances. For example the New Media Precinct at RMIT is designed to facilitate the collaborative use of broadcast equipment in a way that reflects industry practice. In this sense the space itself is a key aspect of the digital learning and teaching experience.

## Institutional Guidance

The guidance component of the framework provides stakeholders with a set of digital learning and teaching resources that support the achievement of RMIT’s digital learning and teaching aspirations and legal obligations. The framework includes four distinct domains of guidance:

1. Six principles, which are broad descriptors that characterise what good digital learning and teaching at RMIT should look like.
2. Threshold standards for online learning environments, which are essential practices that should be followed in all RMIT offerings
3. Style guide for online learning environments, which are a mix of essential conventions as well as guidance for ensuring digital learning and teaching is consistent, on-brand, accessible and inclusive.
4. Good practice guidelines, which are designed to support exemplary and transformative digital learning and teaching.

### Six guiding good practice principles

The *Digital Learning and Teaching Framework* is underpinned by a set of six guiding good practice principles. These principles emerged from consultation with teaching and professional staff from across the university, as well as being aligned with university strategic goals. They are used in generating a set of standards or guidelines that address the key areas in the planning, creating, reviewing, delivering and evaluating of digital learning and teaching. The principles are described in the table below

Principle	Descriptor	Icon
Aligned	Course/Program activities, assessments and learning outcomes are aligned with program outcomes and where relevant, industry/government requirements.	
Clear	There is clarity in the course/program and site purpose, relevance, navigation and communication	
Consistent	The course/program design and site contributes to a consistent learner experience.	
Dynamic	The course/program design and site actively engage students, are responsive to their input, activities and needs, and reflect current education and industry practices.	
Inclusive	The course/program design and site are accessible to and welcoming of a diversity of learners and cohorts, and meets their learning needs.	
Connected	The course/program design and site connect students with one another, staff, the wider university and industry communities, and other stakeholders.	

## **Threshold standards for online course environments**

The threshold standards are a set of potentially visible digital learning and teaching practices that should be met by all courses and programs across RMIT. The threshold standards describe what all RMIT students have a right to expect and are informed by the six principles (and broader standards frameworks). There are a brief set of overarching program standards and a set of individual course standards that are grouped according to ten key areas of a course. Grouping the course standards makes it easier to identify relevant areas to focus on at different points in the *course production and delivery cycle*. For stakeholders, the standards are designed to facilitate the *planning, creating, review, delivery and evaluation* of programs and courses.

It should be noted that the threshold standards exist to support the broader Higher Education Standards Framework by articulating only the standards that are relevant to digital learning and teaching and contextualising them to RMIT.

## **Style guide for online course environments**

The style guide is specifically focused on the presentation of digital content. In contrast to the standards, the style guide details conventions that should be followed equally for all content. All content, no matter where it is in an online course environment must adhere to the style guide, which is based upon RMIT's own branding guidelines, writing guide, Canvas LMS terminology and WCAG accessibility standards. The style guide is designed to help stakeholders *edit* content regardless of whether it is in development or is already published.

## **Good practice guidelines**

The good practice guidelines are an evolving resource (or, in practice, more likely a set of resources) that aims to spread the word on outstanding digital learning and teaching practice that can have potential applicability across the University. The guidelines will grow and develop over time with input from within the Education Portfolio and across RMIT. The guidelines themselves will take the form of an online resource that will allow different exemplars to be shown in the form that they are used (e.g. interactive media, presentations, Canvas sites etc.).

These guidelines are not marked as essential because the practices contained within are not necessarily going to be universally adopted or they might not be easily measurable. Rather, the good practice guidelines represent a practical commitment that at RMIT identifying and sharing exemplary digital learning and teaching practice is part of our core work.

For stakeholders, the good practice guidelines will offer exemplars, resources and guidance and support to inspire them to develop and share exemplary digital learning and teaching practice. Examples of resources will include pedagogical approaches, interactive and multimedia, templates (particularly Canvas templates), technology recommendations, user guides, lessons from data and analytics and many others.