

Statement for students studying in an online environment

- **Developed with support from Queensland University of Technology.**

Introduction

As a response to the recent COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of Australian higher education providers and courses have moved to online teaching modes of delivery.

Under the Higher Education Threshold Standards, Standard 1.3.6 it is important to highlight that:

Students haven equivalent opportunities for successful transition into and progression through their course of study, irrespective of their educational background, entry pathway, mode or place of study.

Online learning is an accepted and legitimate mode of study in Australia and many students are presently completing their degrees online, and under Standard 3.1.4:

Each course of study is designed to enable achievement of expected learning outcomes regardless of a student's place of study or the mode of delivery.

Transition to Online Learning

Done well, online learning modes of delivery are of an “equivalent” standard and quality, to any face-to-face delivery. Many stakeholders in Australian higher education believe that there are tremendous opportunities, advantages and good practices that access to the online delivery of higher education can provide.

Online delivery is a respected mode of delivery in Australia and the higher education sector does not believe that an online degree is a lesser degree than a face-to-face learning experience, nor that online degrees and modes of delivery are of any less quality than a face-to-face course offering. In considering the current COVID-19 transition to an online environment, it should be noted that prior to the recent pandemic, most Australian providers of higher education have been using some form of online “blended” modes of delivery in their teaching.

The student experience of online learning

The quality of the student experience in studying in an online environment is the key to good practice and a positive learning outcome. In the transition to an online learning environment, Higher Education Providers should ensure students should have the best opportunity for success in their studies. Every Higher Education Provider will approach the transition to the online environment according to their own academic frameworks. Many providers will



provide a “student charter” or other student advice document, which outlines expectations for students in studying in an online environment. Overall, all student cohorts should be supported in their online studies and key elements of a positive online learning environment will take account of:

- **Connectivity:** allows for the student to connect wherever their geographical location and allows for reasonable data speed to complete their studies. The technology used in different teaching scenarios should be readily accessible to students.
- Students will have the best chance of success when they can access and navigate a **reliable learning management system** and online learning environment.
- Approaches to teaching should encourage **inclusive and equitable, learning experiences** that value diversity and make the best use of the available technology.
- A **respectful learning community** is to be encouraged in which students feel safe to contribute and provide feedback. It is important to establish rapport with all students in a class to encourage engagement and develop varied approaches to learning that provide opportunities to engage with other students.
- The **provision of learning resources** and activities that are well designed and contextualised to show relevance and connection to the learning outcomes. These resources can be across a range of mediums and include an array of digital options
- All **assessment** activities are provided in a clear, detailed and easily accessible format and are appropriate to the level of study and complexity of the learning experience.
- Academic staff provide **meaningful and timely feedback on a regular basis** including opportunities for formative and student feedback.
- All staff involved in the delivery of the course are **responsive to students and supportive** to students operating in an online environment, set clear expectations and communicate timely information, and follow up on non-attendance.
- Clear and regular communications are provided by academics and support staff to support students who may need assistance to access a range of student and **academic support services and resources.**
- A range of **personal support services** are made available to students in an online environment, and students are supported in the student’s ongoing adaptation to a new online learning environment
- All students are aware of their obligations regarding **academic integrity**, and of the consequences of contract cheating.

Source: adapted from QUT DRAFT Student Digital Learning Charter

Conclusion

Australian Higher Education Providers pride themselves on the provision of quality higher education and many providers are successfully adopting student-centred approaches to the delivery of online learning. All registered Australian providers will continue to meet the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015, as they adapt and support student in the delivery of online teaching and learning in response to COVID-19.



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