Digital Learning Tool Management Policy v1

The Open College

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Contents

Figure 1: A close up of a sign Description automatically generated

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1 Document Control

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1.0
Responsibility
Leadership Team
Review Cycle
Yearly
Next Review
This policy is due for review upon publication of updated QQI QA guidelines in 2025/2026

1.1 Record of Revisions

Version	Date	Description	Approved by
1.0	May 2025	Initial Version	AB

Digital Learning Tool Management Policy
Purpose:

The Open College is committed to leveraging digital learning tools and educational technologies to enhance the quality, accessibility, and engagement of its QQI-accredited programmes, particularly for its fully online provision. This policy establishes the principles and overarching framework for the systematic review, thoughtful adoption, and effective management of such tools.

Our approach is guided by core institutional values and commitments as articulated in our **Strategic Plan**, **QA Manual**, **Online/Blended Learning Frameworks**. Key principles underpinning this policy include:

- **Pedagogical Primacy:** Digital tools must serve clear educational purposes, supporting effective teaching, active learning, and the achievement of defined learning outcomes.

- **Learner-Centred Design:** Tool selection and implementation will prioritise the needs of our diverse learners, fostering an inclusive, accessible (in line with our Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy, UDL principles, and EAA commitments), and supportive digital learning environment.

- **Quality Assurance:** A robust process of evaluation ensures that tools are fit-for-purpose, reliable, secure, and compliant with relevant data protection (GDPR) and Cyber Security standards.

- **Strategic Alignment and Sustainability:** The adoption of tools must align with the College's strategic objectives, be sustainable in terms of resources (financial and human), and offer demonstrable value.

- **Collaboration and Expertise:** Decisions regarding digital tools involve collaborative input from academic staff, the Education Technologist, IT support, and relevant governance bodies.

Scope:

This policy applies to all digital learning tools and educational technologies proposed for, or currently in use within, The Open College's QQI-accredited programmes.

This includes core VLE (Moodle) functionalities, synchronous communication platforms, content creation and assessment tools, and any third-party applications that directly impact the teaching and learning experience.

Governance and Responsibilities:

The effective governance of digital learning tools is a shared responsibility, ensuring that decisions are informed, transparent, and aligned with institutional quality standards.

- The Education Technologist plays a lead role in identifying and evaluating the pedagogical suitability and accessibility of digital tools, and in supporting staff in their effective use.

- IT Support is responsible for assessing technical feasibility, security, integration, and ongoing maintenance of tools, ensuring alignment with the **Cyber Security Policy**.

- The Education Technologist and programme leads, undertake the formal review of proposed tools against established criteria as a digital tool review group (DTRG).

- The Operations Manager and Leadership Team consider resourcing, contractual matters, and overall strategic fit.

- The Academic Board provides ultimate oversight and approval for tools with significant institutional, pedagogical, or financial implications, ensuring alignment with the College's academic standards as defined in the QA Manual.

Detailed operational procedure for tool proposal is available at the end of this document.

Process for Tool Adoption and Management:

The lifecycle for digital learning tools within The Open College follows a structured process:

- **Proposal and Needs Analysis:** The process begins with the identification of a pedagogical need by academic staff or a department, leading to a formal proposal outlining the tool's potential benefits and alignment with learning objectives.

- **Evaluation and Piloting:** Proposed tools undergo a comprehensive evaluation by the DTRG based on the principles outlined in this policy. This includes assessment of pedagogical value, accessibility, technical robustness, security, data privacy, integration capabilities, and support requirements. Where appropriate, a formal pilot with staff and learners is conducted to gather practical feedback.

- **Decision and Implementation:** Based on the evaluation, a recommendation is made regarding adoption. Approved tools are implemented with appropriate training and support for staff and learners, ensuring smooth integration into the learning environment. A central register of approved tools is maintained.

- **Ongoing Review and Support:** The use and effectiveness of all adopted tools are subject to ongoing review as part of the College's regular QA cycles and programme monitoring processes (refer to **QA Manual, Section 12: Evaluation and Continuous Improvement**). This ensures tools remain fit for purpose, and that support and training adapt to evolving needs. Tools may be deprecated if they no longer meet institutional standards or pedagogical requirements.

Exceptions and Lecturer Discretion:

The Open College recognises the need for flexibility and innovation in digital pedagogy. Lecturers and tutors may, on occasion, use external tools to support live teaching or engagement, provided the following conditions are met.

Permitted Discretionary Use

Tutors may use external digital tools in a discretionary manner under the following conditions:

- The tool is used for live teaching or short-term engagement (e.g., polls, whiteboards, collaborative writing)

- The tool does **not** collect or store identifiable learner data (e.g., names, emails, submissions)

- The tool does **not** influence grading, formal feedback, or progression

- Learners are not required to create personal accounts.

Where any of the above thresholds are crossed, the tool must be reviewed under the formal process outlined in tool management and adaptation section.

Good Practice Guidance

Even for discretionary use, tutors are encouraged to:

- Choose tools that are accessible (e.g., support keyboard navigation, mobile compatibility).

- Offer alternatives where learners are unable to engage with the tool.

- Avoid reliance on a single digital format or mode of interaction.

- Consider learner fatigue and tool overload when introducing new platforms.

Risk and Support

Tutors are responsible for ensuring that use of non-approved tools does not create confusion, inequality of access, or data protection risks. The Education Technologist is available to provide informal advice even for tools used at discretion.

Where repeated or widespread use of a tool is observed, it may be referred for formal evaluation.

Policy Review:

This policy will be reviewed every two years, or more frequently if required by significant changes in technology, QQI guidelines, or institutional strategy. The review will be led by

the Education Technologist in consultation with the DTRG, with proposed revisions submitted to the Academic Policy and QA Committee and the Academic Board for approval.

Appendix A: Digital Learning Tool Proposal Form:

Please submit the Digital Learning Tool Proposal Form using the online link below.

This form will be received by the Education Technologist and following receipt of the form, the education technologist will undertake the formal review of the tool as detailed in the **Policy and Procedure for Digital Learning Tool Review, Adoption, and Management.**

Digital Learning Tool Proposal Form