**Blended Learning at the Global Alliance Academy (GAA)**

GAA is developing its VLE blended learning to enhance and supplement its learning, teaching and assessment so that students can take advantage of integrated delivery of learning opportunities.

Its strategy seeks to use multiple methods to deliver learning by combining face-to-face classroom and personal interactions with VLE activities. The aim is encourage and prolong active student engagement with staff and programmes by varying the channels between face to face and virtual engagement providing flexibility in how, when and where the students can engage with programmes. The VLE must not be regarded simply as a repository for lecture notes but as an integral part of the learning, teaching and assessment strategy, supporting each area of these three categories.

VLE activity is usually most concentrated after the classroom session but can proceed it in the form of preparatory reading materials providing a springboard for students to conduct further online research. This can mean that classroom activity is spent in small groups with the aim of deepening this learning through more practical work-based problem-based activities. It enables a movement from the dissemination of information in the classroom to using preparatory online work and research to enable a more interactive, discussion based experience with practical work experience projects in the classroom. In the longer term, some elements of distancing learning could be combined with class sessions in which some learners join remotely online.

Different blended approaches are possible combing various combinations of online and face-to-face components. Younger students in particular tend to welcome the use of digital resources and so this can be used to increase student engagement and interest in their work. But specific support efforts must be made to ensure that mature students are able to understand and access the VLE.

Populating the VLE is an ongoing process providing up to date information, lecture material and forums, constantly seeking to test and incorporate new offerings delivery but only if they can be demonstrated to improve the student experience. For example, it is possible to also incorporate the marking of assignments into the VLE and make this entirely electronic. However, at present teaching staff believe and student feedback confirms that it is important that the physical delivery, marking and feedback on assignments is done on a face to face basis, building relations with students and encouraging them to verbally respond to feedback and follow-up. Another

Version . 1:1  September '18

possible development of blended learning is distance learning though this would have to be specifically discussed with partners or developed on a TDAP basis if the latter is granted by the QAA. Webinars and web conferencing will be incorporated as GAA builds up programme numbers and the interest of external subscribers through its web site.

**Digital Literacy**

GAA recognises the importance of digital literacy in the professional career of students and will make concerted efforts to prepare students to study and to work in a technology-rich environment. The majority of academic and professional careers demand a sound level of competency in using a computer, navigating the Internet purposefully to find useful information; interpret, evaluate, manage and share the information; communicate electronically and maintain and manage digital identity.

**Increased use of online media for communication and collaboration**

The VLE competes with a vast number of blogging and forum options available to the students through third party websites and popular social media. GAA recognises that third party websites and social media often do not engage students in healthy and useful academic discussions particularly relevant to their day to day topics taught in the classrooms. To address these issues students will be encouraged to use the forums as a collaborative learning and information sharing platform. Lecturers will be encouraged to raise the interest of students by posting interesting topics and responding to the student comments to build a habit of entering into academic discussions. Lecturers will also be encouraged to post quizzes and questions for students to answer and provide feedback on their performance.

**Integrating Digital Literacy in the curriculum**

Blended learning contributes to students digital literacy skills. GAA recognises the need to develop constructive pedagogic strategies employing digital skills to impart useful lifelong skills to students. GAA provides full support to its staff to enhance digital skills by organising staff development sessions on the use of digital technology in education and employment. Identifying how digital literacy can play a role in a particular subject area and tailoring the teaching, learning and assessments accordingly will help students to develop employment ready skills while completing their course. GAA staff teaching on individual courses must ensure that digital skills are incorporated in the curriculum.

GAA will organise sessions on the use of the latest technology and computer based data analysis skills. This will help students to use the computer hardware and software with a good confidence. This will also help students to carry out data analysis in terms of organising, representing, interpreting and evaluating the data to draw useful conclusions required in the completion of their formative and summative assessments.

Version . 1:1  September '18

GAA will ensure that it has a sound IT infrastructure to support its teaching and learning, academic and administrative operations. State-of –art teaching aids will be made available in classrooms.

**Use of VLE to support teaching and learning**

Classrooms provide a unique, inspiring and secure learning environment where students build on their own experiences and  acquire knowledge and expertise. Learning and motivation are stimulated by actively engaging in real-life scenarios through a variety of methods in order to reach all students effectively.

 These can include the use  of lectures,  tutorials,  seminars,  consultations, guest lectures, directed learning, case studies and practical workshops.

At undergraduate level the teaching strategy includes a staged movement from an initial focus on directed learning to the  student  taking  greater  incremental  responsibility  for  their  learning as  they  progress through the programme.

Students will learn from lecture, seminar and workshop activities and from both directed and student initiated self –study.

The VLE at GAA is used as a resource hub to provide additional support and will never take the place of direct teaching or teachers in the classroom.  It can facilitate, make more productive, ease and enhance many aspects of both teacher's and student's life.

Our VLE provides students with links to outside sources, discussion areas that are linked to course material, online quizzes and self–tests.

In addition to learning materials, External examiners reports, minutes of course committees and Information on GAA learning support services such as Academic writing skills, Research skills and Disability Support are made available to students on the VLE.

The VLE has provision to use tools for formative and summative assessment such as self–tests with marking and feedback. Some elements of this is currently being used but greater emphasis is given on tutor led learning activity at undergraduate level.