A Good Practice Framework for RMIT online learning environments

Introduction
The framework can be used as a

- Planning tool for the development and support of online learning environments
- Review tool to identify improvement opportunities as part of the course and department improvement processes

The framework was developed by RMIT and a team of experts as part of a national project. The framework was then contextualised and condensed by RMIT for use by course teams. It has been adopted by the Teaching and Learning Strategy Committee as guidelines for course management and support teams under the RMIT EQA system. In particular Course Teams are expected to engage in developing and supporting online learning environments in a manner consistent with these guidelines. In addition, Review Teams will refer to these guidelines as part of their constructive comment on course team improvement processes.

A full version of the framework can be accessed through the DEETYA site at http://www.deetya.gov.au/nbeet/hec/publicat/rbl/contents.htm or by email quality@rmit.edu.au. This full version is provided to clarify and extend the RMIT framework.

Good practice in delivering online learning exists when course teams focus not just on the finished product, but also attend to improving online activities leading to quality outcomes. These activities form the basis of the framework.

Fig 1 The Good Practice Framework

The Framework is a nested framework and identifies:

10 essential principles to consider when implementing good practice.

Each principle lists 4-5 indicators which identify when good practice has been achieved.

Strategies to achieve good practice are developed by each team.

Checklists can be developed by course teams as supplementary documentation for course logs.

Course teams can use these indicators to identify and prioritise any necessary improvement activities (Refer to fig 2) for their online delivery courses.

The ten principles which have been identified as essential in the development of good practice are;

1. Informed planning and management of resources
2. Sustained committed **leadership**
3. Improving access for all clients, incorporates **equity** and promotes cultural diversity
4. Understanding the requirements of the **learner** and reflects stakeholder requirements
5. The **design**, development and implementation of programs for effective and active learning
6. Creating confident and committed **staff** with new competencies
7. Managing and maintaining the **technical** infrastructure
8. Evaluating for continuous **improvement**
9. The provision of effective and efficient **administrative** systems and services
10. Supporting the needs of learners

**Using the Framework - Course Teams and Review Teams**

The framework can be used by course teams to analyse and improve their online delivery and by review teams when reviewing online learning improvements.

Fig 2

**A Good Practice Framework for RMIT online learning environments**
Principle 1. Good practice for RMIT online delivery involves informed planning and management of resources

Policies and mission statements adopted by online projects must include reference to RMIT teaching and learning strategies. Online delivery at RMIT ensures that trained people, infrastructure, and facilities are available and adequate for each project.

Indicators Of Good Practice

1. Planning for online delivery is integrated with all planning activities within the faculty/department, including financial, human resource and support service.
2. An improvement plan identifying responsibilities, performance indicators and processes has been developed and is monitored to evaluate online programs.
3. A realistic costing of all aspects of online delivery has been made including equitable allocation of all departmental resources.
4. Online policies and processes have been incorporated into the RMIT Quality.
5. Projects are regularly reviewed and opportunities identified are acted upon.

Principle 2. Good practice for RMIT online delivery involves sustained committed leadership.

Leadership style and behaviour is critical in ensuring that the university’s goals for RMIT online delivery are achieved.

Institutional support for the development and use of online activities are a critical prerequisite for widespread adoption and integration into mainstream programs.

Indicators Of Good Practice

1. Staff in leadership roles demonstrate commitment to the provision and maintenance of online activities and ongoing improvement processes.
2. Strategies have been implemented to provide a level of complex technical and online support required to run efficient, reliable and ‘user friendly’ systems.
3. Collaborative arrangements with other faculties and departments and/or with other educational institutions and/or with industry have been explored to ensure effective access to and use of resources.
4. The impact of online projects and its outcomes on existing managerial, administrative and physical facilities has been assessed.
Principle 3. Good practice for RMIT online delivery involves improving access for all clients, incorporates equity and promotes cultural diversity.

The provision of online projects improves the access, participation and success rates of under-represented groups.

Learning opportunities ensure that learners are not limited in their engagement due to physical location, disability, race, ethnicity, level of technological skills or level of access to physical resources and that their level of language and literacy skills are taken into account. Appropriate access to the outcomes of RMIT online delivery is available to all students irrespective of income and location. Online delivery actively encourages the diversity of student groups.

Indicators Of Good Practice

1. Barriers that prevent current and potential students accessing online delivery products and services are identified and strategies to improve access and participation are implemented
2. Existing data from the Pro-Vice Chancellor Academic Services and Equity’s office is used to identify and develop specific strategies for targeted equity groups.
3. Courseware development for RMIT online delivery accommodates the background skills and interests of equity groups
4. Delivery media are selected on the basis of ‘best fit’ between learner effectiveness, accessibility and cost
5. Programs avoid prohibitive attendance requirements, unnecessary control the pace of learning, or restriction of entry and exit options

Principle 4. Good practice for RMIT online delivery involves understanding the requirements of the learner and reflects stakeholder requirements.

The main focus of online developments is the needs of learners, clients and stakeholders. Online delivery has a student centred approach that is soundly based in an understanding of learners’ characteristics and needs. Stakeholder requirements are reflected in the provision of online projects.

Indicators of Good Practice

1. External and internal clients and stakeholders have been identified (eg government agencies, community groups etc) and their needs and expectations are reflected in online delivery processes
2. Online delivery policies and practices make clear the university’s obligations to its learners and the learner’s obligation to the institution
3. An appropriate range of resources is available to accommodate student learning
4. A process for assessing customer requirements and satisfaction is developed
Principle 5. Good practice in RMIT online delivery involves the design, development and implementation of programs for effective and active learning.

Course design, development and implementation processes are sufficiently rigorous to ensure that courses meet the requirements of learners, industry and the professions and are effective in achieving learning outcomes.

Indicators of Good Practice

**Course Design, Development and Assessment**

1. Course design incorporates interactive instruction techniques mediated by human intervention and a supportive learning environment
2. Program and course objectives clearly specify the subject matter to be covered, the intellectual skills to be acquired and the learning methods used
3. Course design processes reflect desired graduate attributes, promotes active learning, and recognises varied starting points in levels of confidence, learning styles and motivation
4. Criteria for evaluating student performance are clearly established, stated in course guidelines and are generally understood by students and staff
5. Online project outcomes are regularly benchmarked against learning outcomes in mainstream courses to ensure consistency

Principle 6. Good practice in RMIT online delivery involves creating confident and committed staff with new competencies

Recruitment and management processes at RMIT provides development opportunities for all staff to ensure that they have the skills to meet client focused and equitable outcomes.

Indicators of Good Practice

1. Formal or informal professional development for online delivery activities (incl. subject, technical and instructional design expertise) are identified and systematically implemented
2. Changes to staff roles and work practices as a result of changes to teaching and learning are recognised, processes are in place to inform HRMG and to address potential industrial relations issues
3. Good practice of RMIT online delivery is both rewarded and effectively
disseminated to all staff across the university

4. Procedures and incentives are in place to encourage staff to make appropriate and innovative use of electronic information resources to improve the academic program, publish scholarly information, and to encourage equitable student use.

5. Where relevant, staff workplans incorporate staff’s professional development needs for the development, delivery and support of online course delivery

Principle 7. Good practice in RMIT online delivery involves managing and maintaining the technical infrastructure

Decisions about the choice of technology are driven by consideration of learners’ needs, the ability of teachers and other staff to provide support for learners, and the curriculum content of the program. Resource materials are of sound quality, suitable for the purpose, and well matched with technologies and with staffing requirements.

Indicators of Good Practice

1. The choice of technology, including the delivery method, reflects learners needs, the curriculum content of the program and human resource availability

2. The technology is supported by a faculty technology plan that includes
   - How the technology is to be used for learning
   - How people are to be trained to use the technology
   - How the technology is to be managed and maintained

3. Information technology standards are in place and members of online projects are aware of these so that they can make an informed choice when making technology purchases

4. Decisions have been made whether any technology is required for the program, and the preferred technology or mix of technologies to satisfy requirements has been identified and prioritised

5. Decisions have been made whether to buy in or adapt existing learning materials or to develop new materials

Principle 8. Good practice for RMIT online delivery involves evaluating for continuous improvement

online delivery evaluates and continuously improves its provision of Flexible delivery. RMIT online initiatives are continuously informed by the evaluation of learning outcomes, equity considerations, cost effectiveness and stakeholder satisfaction.

Indicators of Good Practice
1. Qualitative and quantitative performance indicators have been identified. e.g
   - Increased participation, faster student completion
   - higher student retention, higher enrolments/re-enrolments,
   - improved graduate attributes,
   - improved access for workers and disadvantaged groups

2. Online delivery processes and outcomes are regularly benchmarked against other
departments or institutions

Online delivery provides for formal investigations and specific ac
deal with student complaints(see student complaint policy)

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**Principle 9.** Good practice for RMIT online delivery involves the provision of effective and efficient
administrative systems and services

*The institution provides administrative systems and services that support and complement the provision of
online delivery.*

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**Indicators of Good Practice**

1. Management information systems are flexible and take into account all aspects of RMIT online delivery including student enrolment, production scheduling, delivery processes, planning and costing mechanisms and meet the demands of RMIT online delivery in terms of timeframes, reliability and accessibility
2. Administrative processes facilitate learner progress while allowing maximum flexibility in program choice
3. There is ready electronic access to information resources such as bulletin boards, etc. with sufficient capacity to supply high-volume data where appropriate
4. Copyright and intellectual property implications of buying, licensing or developing materials have been explored and processes are in place conforming with university policy

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**Principle 10.** Good practice in RMIT online delivery involves supporting the needs of learners

*The needs for student learning, technical and personal support for online delivery are identified, provided
and regularly reviewed. Decisions on the comprehensiveness of services depend on the purposes of online
delivery and the diversity of its student body.*

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**Indicators of Good Practice**

1. Online delivery systematically studies the characteristics of its student cohort and
identifies the support needs of the student population
2. Online delivery has an organised system for admission, assessment, orientation, support
and student follow-up compatible with the circumstances of students
3. Support services are provided to enable all students to participate effectively and to
enhance their success in achieving their educational outcomes

4. Educational programs address differing skill levels of users, and strategies are implemented to provide online help and support

5. A decision has been made about the extent to which equipment will be provided to learners (e.g., on loan, or by access in a library), and the extent to which equipment must be provided for staff use

6. Precise, accurate and current information is readily available and well publicised to students concerning: (a) educational outcomes (b) degrees, curricular offerings; (c) the total costs of online delivery modules, other financial obligations; student financial aid and fee refund policies; (d) requirements for admission and for achievement of degrees; (e) assessment processes; and, (f) rules defining inappropriate student conduct and the redress of grievances