

## MODEL AND REGULATION

### CHAPTER I

#### GENERAL PROVISIONS

##### **Article 1**

##### **Context**

In the beginning of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic hits countries around the globe with great impact, causing a devastating effect in the economy and in society at large. The restrictions that were imposed to ensure physical distancing between people, affected all types of activities including teaching.

In Europe, many Higher Education Institutions (HEI) had to develop fast institutional responses to the COVID-19 disruption, initially tackling logistic issues and ensuring the necessary technological provision in order to replace face-to-face classes by synchronous distance learning, while it was not possible to resume the traditional teaching modality.

This rapid digital transformation of HEI, driven by a global health emergency, soon became an opportunity to boost a technology-enhanced approach to learning and teaching with the same level of excellence and effectiveness in virtual settings as in the traditional context.

As a result, many HEI began training their faculty for the use of digital technologies to ensure online distance education or blended models that integrate both traditional face-to-face instructional time and computer-mediated activities. At the same time, they invested on the modernization of their own infrastructure, as it became clear that these skills and resources will be essential for leading universities of the 21st-century to succeed and for students to thrive in a competitive and fast-changing world.

Despite the recent implementation of vaccination plans across Europe, there is still a general sense of uncertainty regarding the future. This calls for HEI to respond in advance with a more flexible approach that encompasses alternate solutions based on bottom-up innovation, peer collaboration, and best-practices sharing to ensure the best quality of their educational products, an efficient use of available resources and the strengthening of the international dimension of teaching.

Hence, NOVA University Lisbon, the Autonomous University of Madrid, and the University of Rome Tor Vergata constituted a consortium that will be financed by the European Commission during the first two years of operations.

This Consortium will reward the best blended-learning courses in each of the three universities, in different areas of knowledge, and the efforts of their faculty to respond to the COVID-19 challenge of distance education, through the creation of an International *Blended Learning Award* (hereinafter also referred to as “BLA”), which shall be governed by the dispositions contained in this regulation.

The most innovative aspect of this initiative is that all three partner HEI are committed to jointly offering the awarded courses, thus allowing for a true virtual mobility based on a shared international catalogue of blended learning courses that will be available to students of the HEI of the Consortium and their partners.

The dimension of the Consortium and the standards of excellence of the three European universities involved provide the perfect test-bed for the implementation of quality innovation models applied to education.

## Article 2

### Object

1 — The BLA will be conferred to the best blended learning courses that are offered in the partner institutions of the Consortium.

2 – The focus of BLA will be on components of the the blended learning model adopted by faculty members when adapting their courses to the restrictions imposed by COVID-19, namely on the quality content, pedagogical implementation, and curricular flexibility, so that the awarded courses may be shared and offered by the other two partner Universities element, allowing for this innovative aspect of the project.

3 - For the purpose of BLA, the term *blended learning* refers to the learning model that allows face-to-face instruction and synchronous computer-mediated instruction. As blended learning can vary widely in its delivery of face-to-face and online content, falling onto a large spectrum of modalities, BLA will consider formats that include flipped classes, web-enhanced courses and courses that combine different types of blended learning.

### Article 3

#### Beneficiaries

- 1 – The target groups of BLA are the partner institutions of the Consortium.
- 2 – BLA will provide faculty members from each partner institution the opportunity to disseminate their work, both internally and internationally, to receive recognition for their excellence in blended learning models, and to use the compilation of best cases as a guiding tool to improve their own strategies of blended education.
- 3 – BLA will provide students from each partner institution the opportunity to undertake formal international learning, with full academic recognition, and to actively interact with students from different countries.
- 4 – BLA will help decision-makers of the partner universities to better understand the operational issues of the implementation of blended models of education and to strengthen their internationalization strategy.
- 5 – Additionally, BLA will benefit similar target groups in universities that are part of the national and international networks of the partner institutions.

### Article 4

#### Strategic alignment with partner institutions

- 1 – The mission of NOVA University Lisbon (NOVA) is to serve society through knowledge, locally and globally, by developing teaching and research of excellence that can create significant social and economic value. Under its 2020-2030 Strategic Plan, NOVA is particularly committed to the promotion of technology-based learning innovation in all cycles of studies, with strong international relevance, and to rewarding best practices in that field.
- 2 – The mission of the Autonomous University of Madrid (UAM) is to provide society with a public service of higher education through research, teaching, and knowledge transfer. In particular, UAM's 2025 Strategy seeks the digital transformation of the University and regards the use of new technologies as an opportunity to innovate in both face-to-face and virtual education, and to improve teaching and learning processes.

3 – The mission of the University of Rome Tor Vergata (UNITOV) is to contribute to people’s education and training, to scientific research and to the technological, organizational and social innovation needed to achieve a truly sustainable development in Italy, Europe and worldwide. Innovation in education and the use of digital tools to design engaging learning opportunities have been an integral part of UNITOV’s action strategy to pursue this mission.

## CHAPTER II

### INTERNATIONAL AWARD ON INNOVATION IN BLENDED LEARNING

#### Article 5

##### Purpose

1 — The general goal of the BLA is to contribute for the quality of European Higher Education in a time of global crisis, by promoting fast inter-institutional learning and collaboration, and a culture of innovation in education.

2 – More specifically, the objectives of the Award are:

- a) to create a true virtual mobility opportunities based on a shared international catalogue of blended learning courses, reinforcing the concept of cross-institutional ECTS awarding;
- b) to create awareness about the importance of delivering innovative and high-quality blended learning and engage faculty of the three partner HEI in the production of blended learning courses of excellence;
- c) to reward the efforts within each partner HEI in responding to the COVID-19 challenge of distance education;
- d) to provide students with a more inclusive approach to international education, focusing more on the curriculum and learning outcomes, and not solely on mobility;
- e) to compile an international catalogue of blended learning courses available to a larger audience of students;
- f) to share and disseminate best practices in the adoption of blended education models at international level;

- g) to develop a community of teachers engaged with blended education who can inspire other faculty members to explore the use of technology in education and/or make a full transition of their courses to a blended format.

## **Article 6**

### **Structure**

- 1 – The Consortium will organize two editions of the BLA and the competition will be carried out separately in each of the partner HEI.
- 2 – At each University, the competition will accept applications in three comprehensive areas of knowledge: Health and Well-Being; Social Sciences and Humanities; and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics).
- 3 – Each area of knowledge will receive one award per each edition: According to this structure, it is expected that at least three (3) courses will be presented by each institution, reaching a minimum of eighteen (18) courses in each edition of the BLA.
- 4 – The winner courses for each edition in each partner HEI and in each area of knowledge will automatically compete for the Grand International Award on Innovation in Blended Learning, to be held in a final event joining the awardees of all three universities.

## **Article 7**

### **Prize amount and funding**

- 1 – 1<sup>st</sup> Prize winning courses in each partner HEI will receive a cash value of three thousand two hundred and fifty (3250) euros.
- 4 – The winner of the Grand Award will receive an additional cash value of four thousand and five hundred (4500) euros.
- 5 – No draws are allowed.
- 6 – All prizes will be supported by each partner university's own funds and awarded to courses represented by those responsible for the production of the winning blended learning material, and not to the department or institution.

## Article 8

### Eligibility

1 – In order to be eligible for the BLA, courses must meet all of the following requirements:

- a) full alignment with the specifications mentioned in Article 2 of this Regulation;
- b) the courses must be offered entirely in English;
- c) the courses must have been implemented by the corresponding partner institution at least in the academic year prior to the one in which the competition takes place;
- d) the courses must have been attended by the minimum considered at each HEI for first cycle, second cycle and third cycle degree programme;
- e) the courses must offer at least three (3) ECTS credits;
- f) previous recipient courses of this BLA are not eligible for the competition.

## Article 9

### Application

1 - Applications to the BLA are voluntary and free of charge in all HEIs of the Consortium.

2 – The official notice of the call for application submissions will be published on the official website of each partner institution and/or their schools and on the project's website.

3 – The call must refer to the present regulation and identify the scope of the BLA, as well as its structure and instructions on how to apply.

4 - Applicants must be faculty members from the consortium (i.e. NOVA, UAM, UNITOV), institutionally recognised by their scientific and pedagogical competences.

5 – Applications must be submitted by the course instructor or by the team at the corresponding partner HEI in an online platform properly identified in the open call of the competition.

6 – During the application stage, the course instructor or team will submit the following mandatory information in English:

- a) a short version of the course instructor or team's curriculum vitae;

- b) the email address of the person responsible for the application, through which the necessary electronic notifications will be made;
- c) a description of the course that uses a blended model of teaching, focusing on the elements to be considered and evaluated by the Jury, as described below in paragraph 1, Article 11 (Annex I);
- d) the course's most recent student assessment.

6 – Applications to this BLA do not exclude applications to other awards, namely those that are carried out within each partner HEI.

## Article 10

### Jury

1 – The partner HEIs of the Consortium are responsible for identifying in advance the pool of experts that will act as members of the Jury.

2 – Each partner HEI will nominate three experts per area of knowledge – a total of nine experts.

3 – Each of the BLA's areas of knowledge in each partner HEI will have an international jury composed by six experts, three from each of the other two partner institutions, who will judge the applications.

4 – Experts from partner HEIs are tenured members institutionally recognized with scientific and pedagogical competences who must have:

- a) the scientific qualifications and background to evaluate the applications in each specific area of knowledge;
- b) the necessary level of exemption and distance to assess their peers without compromising the evaluation process;
- c) the authority to ensure that the evaluated blended courses have the required quality standards to be offered at their respective home institutions.

5 – The rules established in the Administrative Procedure Code of each partner HEI on impartiality are applicable to all members of the jury.

6 – The inclusion of an all-external and international jury composition is crucial to ensure full independence and transparency of the evaluation process.

## Article 11

### Evaluation process and criteria

1 – Once the deadline for application submission is over, the jury will evaluate the applications according to the following criteria:

1. **Quality of the Application (15 points):**
  1. Clarity of the information presented in the course description
  2. Quality of the course content
  3. Evidence of adequate use of technology for face-to-face and remote interaction aiming blended learning
2. **Pedagogical Merit (40 points):**
  1. Justification of the pedagogical choices including rationale for the use of technology
  2. Evidence of introduction of interdisciplinary concepts
  3. Curricular flexibility allowing sharing the course at other Universities (transferability potential)
3. **Outreach (15 points):**
  1. Inclusive of people with fewer opportunities (as defined by the Erasmus+)
  2. Embracing cross-cultural diversity
4. **Impact (30 points):**
  1. Course's capacity to contribute to the pedagogical development of the instructor or team of instructors.
  2. Course's capacity to contribute to the implementation of resilient and innovative pedagogical policies
  3. Course's capacity to help implement a virtual mobility policy.

2 – During the evaluation process, the jury will take into consideration the diversity of fields covered by the applications within each area of knowledge.

3 – Upon completion of the evaluation process, the jury proceeds to the ranking of all valid applications.

4 – Candidates will be informed of the results of their application and the final ordering.

5 – The names of the BLA-winning courses and their respective instructors will be publicly disclosed.



6 – The jury may decide not to award the Prize if the applications do not meet the necessary requirements.

7 – All applications that reach a score of fifty (50) points may be considered to join a shared catalogue of international blended learning courses.

## **Article 12**

### **BLA dissemination and results**

1 – Dissemination of the BLA and winning courses will be channeled through the website, social media platforms, and newsletters of the three partner universities, and also through other media deemed more appropriate.

2 – BLA-winning courses and other high-quality courses will join a shared International Catalogue of Virtual Mobility that will be available to students from the HEI of the Consortium and their partners, as part of their formal programmes, and may be accessed in an online publication that will compile all the best cases.

3 – These courses will accept students from the other two universities of the Consortium and their learning outcomes will be formally recognized with ECTS credits.

4 – The creation of an International Catalogue of Virtual Mobility is aligned with the current educational policies of the European Commission, increases the visibility of the educational offer of each partner HEI, and creates an opportunity for more students and faculty/department to engage in international learning opportunities.

## **Article 13**

### **Timeline**

1 – In each edition of the BLA, the Rector, or member of the Rectoral Team to whom that competence has been delegated, determines the opening of the call for application submission through an official notice advertised in the appropriate media.

2 – The application period must be open for at least one hundred and twenty (120) days between June and December, after the official notice of the BLA is published.

3 – The results of the application for the BLA will be announced during a formal ceremony held at each partner HEI, no later than forty (40) working days after the end

of the application period, in which the awardees will present their projects to a considerable audience from each institution's academic community.

4 – Following the official announcement of the results in each partner HEI, there will be one final event, bringing together the awardees of the three universities, who will present their projects to a large international audience. The event will culminate with the announcement of the winner of the Grand Award, selected among the pool of BLA winners in each partner HEI. The Grand Award will be announced in the final event.

## **Article 14**

### **Personal Data Protection**

1 – The application form will be processed electronically.

2 – All personal data will be processed in accordance with EC Regulation No 45/2001 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data by the EU institutions and bodies, and on the free movement of such data.

3 – All personal data will only be used for the purpose of this BLA, namely the processing of the application, the management of the administrative and financial aspects of the project and the dissemination of results through the appropriate Erasmus+ IT tools. Regarding the latter, a term of consent will always be requested.

## **Article 15**

### **Final provisions**

1 – The present Regulation may be revised whenever deemed necessary for the best attainment of the intended purposes, and any changes to it must not interfere with the rules in force during the application and evaluation periods.

2 - Any decisions on omissions or clarifications related to the present Regulation are under the competence of the Rector of each partner HEI.

3 - The present Regulation shall be in effect upon its approval and notification in the applicable legal terms.

**BLENDED LEARNING AWARD  
2021 | 1<sup>st</sup> Edition  
Annex I**

The guidelines below aim to structure the scope of information to be provided by applicants under each evaluation topic. The information provided by applicants on every BLA criterion should not exceed 20 pages in total (Font 11 - Times New Roman).

Course Name	
Course Reference Code	
Contact Person	
University	
Faculty/School	

**1. Quality of the Application (15 points)**

1.1. Clarity of the information presented in the course description

1.1.1. Quality of the course content

1.1.2. Evidence of adequate use of technology for face-to-face and remote interaction aiming blended learning

**2. Pedagogical Merit (40 points)**

2.1. Justification of the pedagogical choices including rationale for the use of technology

2.2. Evidence of introduction of interdisciplinary concepts

2.3. Curricular flexibility allowing sharing the course at other Universities (transferability potential)

**3. Outreach (15 points)**

3.1. Inclusive of people with fewer opportunities (as defined by the Erasmus+)

3.2. Embracing cross-cultural diversity

**4. Impact (30 points)**

4.1. Course's capacity to contribute to the pedagogical development of the instructor or team of instructors.

4.2. Course's capacity to contribute to the implementation of resilient and innovative pedagogical policies

4.3. Course's capacity to help implement a virtual mobility policy.

