**E**uropean **M**aturity model for **B**lended **Ed**ucation (EMBED)

This strategic partnership is about introducing innovation in higher education by the implementation of blended learning (b-learning) in the partnership and beyond. The partnership consists of frontrunner universities in b-learning European wide for full expert representation. They will create a reference model for developing and implementing blended learning, embracing all levels of an institution: the design of the blended course, organisational aspects such as staff support and training, and institutional leadership, developing policies and strategies making the institution continuously innovative.

It is a maturity model with criteria and instruments to assess the degree of maturity of b-learning and innovation. Connected with this is a framework for change, based on progress markers related to stakeholder-focused outcomes. Internal stakeholders are learners, teaching staff, teaching and learning departments, technology departments and university leadership. External stakeholders, influencing practices and policies in universities: governments, European university networks and the EU level.

The concept of blended learning itself is far from clear-cut. The literature spans various definitions and meanings, e.g. ”the thoughtful integration of conventional and digital methods of teaching and learning” (Graham, et al., 2013). It is agreed that the digital is not a supplement and does not simply replicate aspects of the conventional – each should enhance the other. Blended learning combines conventional and digital methods to achieve an “optimal exploitation of ICT and internet” integrated with the conventional technologies of physical material, and co-presence in space and time. The value of blending the two is that digital methods offer much greater personalization, flexibility, inclusiveness and efficiency than conventional methods can, but they have to be used appropriately (Laurillard, 2015).

This matters, because universities face challenges as keeping quality with large student numbers and lower budgets per learner, supporting study progress and success and meeting the needs of part-time students. Innovation by b- learning will lead to quality enhancement of the learning experience, personalization, accessibility, flexibility and inclusion. Furthermore b-learning is suitable for teaching large groups synchronously and asynchronously; constituting small learning groups; capitalizing on the worldwide connection with research; multi-campus education and blended mobility, etc.

Hence, b-learning plays a role in solving problems teachers and leaders face. Also, they enrich institutional concepts on learning (e.g. the “guided independent learning” or “active learning” models), as well as institutional policies for teaching and learning. Furthermore, it can contribute to solutions related to scalability and cost-effectiveness in higher education.

B-learning practice is increasing, primarily because of the ubiquitous presence of digital technology and the increase in the digital skills of both students and teachers. EUA studies revealed that a majority of HEIs have established blended learning courses and programs. But, more than half of the institutions applied b-learning in 'some' faculties or by 'individual teachers' (Gaebel, Kupriyano and Morais; Sursock (2015). However, the Changing Pedagogical Landscape study made clear that even

within frontrunner institutions only 20% or less of the courses are blended. Moreover, many course models used just replicate face to face courses or don’t meet the requirements of high quality course design.

A preliminary force field analysis was done within the partnership with regard to innovation by implementing b-learning.

Positive factors for succeeding b-learning implementation were: the strong presence of digital technology at universities and digital skills of students and teachers; strong learning environments; good practices in b-learning, although incrementally dispersed; the experience with MOOCs; the need for enhancing quality for large student numbers of students; the need for covering all types of learning; where applicable a strong institutional leadership. These positive factors are important for anchoring change processes.

Negative factors were: academic culture not in favour of innovation; attitudes of students and staff towards online learning; leadership not engaged for innovation by b-learning; no policies, strategies, concepts, frameworks; mis-conceptions on blended/online teaching; low awareness of innovative pedagogies; b-learning competences of staff not enough developed; no adequate solutions for the changing workload of staff; partial innovations only; no incentives for career development; no substantial budget; weak governmental strategies.

Partner institutions are engaged, but developments are going slow and efforts are dispersed and not systemic enough.

The project will contribute to a deep change within the partnership and beyond.

**Partnership:**

* **EADTU**
* **Delft University**
* **University of Edinburgh**
* **KU-Leuven**
* **DCU**
* **Aarhus University**
* **Tamk**