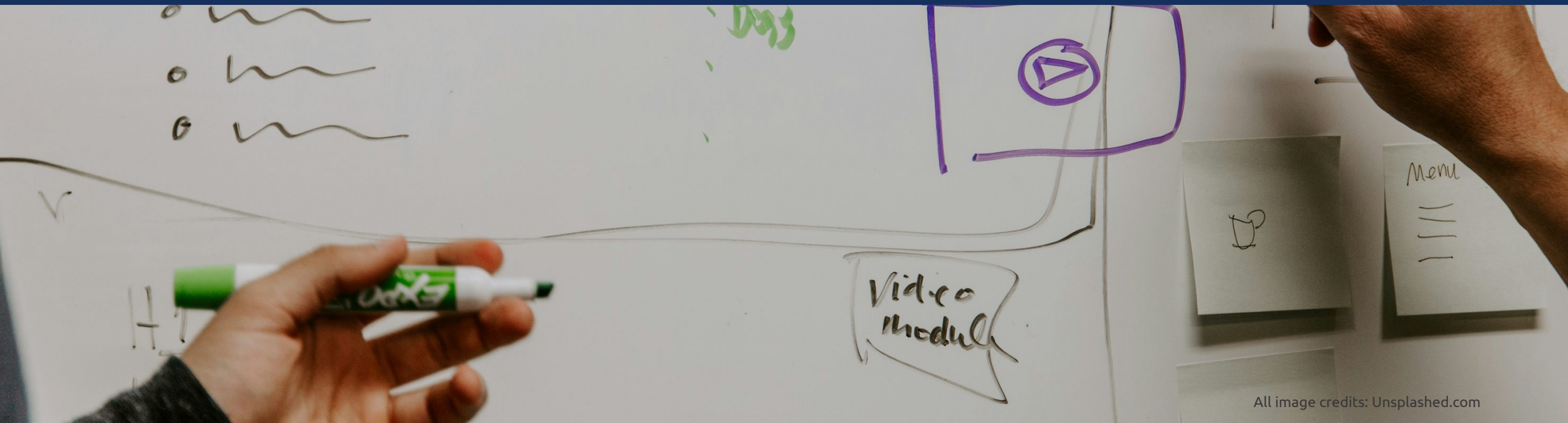# QA of online, blended and open distance learning

Dr Miné de Klerk

26 Sep. 2024

Eduvos

Overview of session

1.) Looking back at the recent evolution of **modes of provision** in HE

2.) The current state of the QA of modes of provision, across the world

3.) Q&A

15 min. break

4.) A practical and fit-for-purpose approach

5.) Q&A

 = Action!
(discussion/activity)

The quality of online higher education must be assured
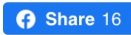
Nita Temmerman 21 September 2019

Adapting quality assurance to the grand switch online

Muzaffer Elmas 06 June 2020

Share   Share 16

The world has become more complicated with the unexpected coronavirus pandemic. New information technologies and capacities

Photo: iStock

The quality of online higher education must be assured

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in Share   f Share 16

The world has become more complicated with the unexpected coronavirus pandemic. New information technologies and capacities

Photo: iStock

European Quality Assurance agencies' response the COVID-19 pandemic - from fire-fighting to re-thinking external Quality Assurance

GLOBAL

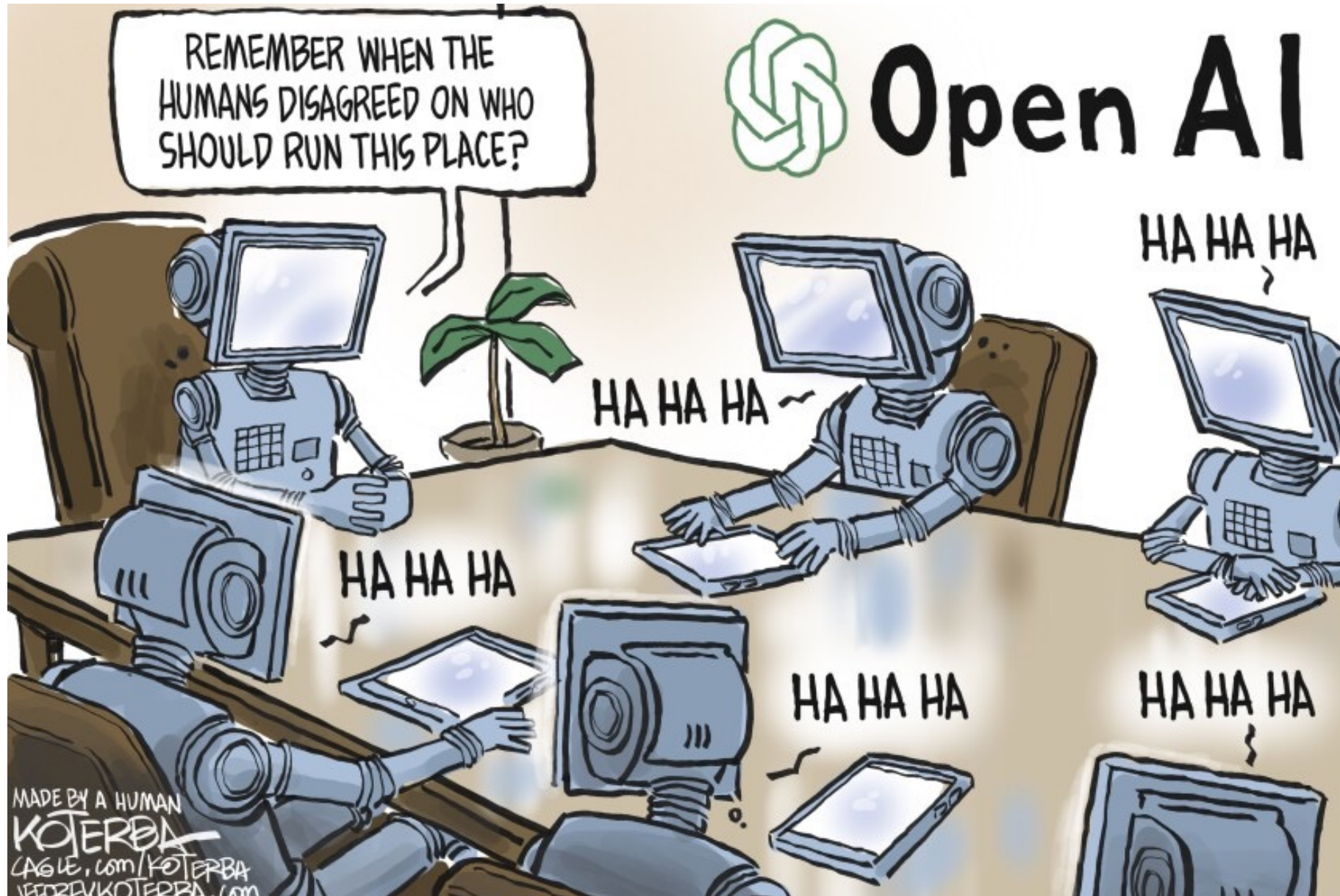# Quality assurance and innovation: A delicate balancing act

Nita Temmerman 17 December 2022

TEACHING

As Colleges Focus on Quality in Online Learning, Advocates Ask: What About In-Person Courses?

By *Taylor Swaak* | March 2, 2023

Source: Duluth News Tribune
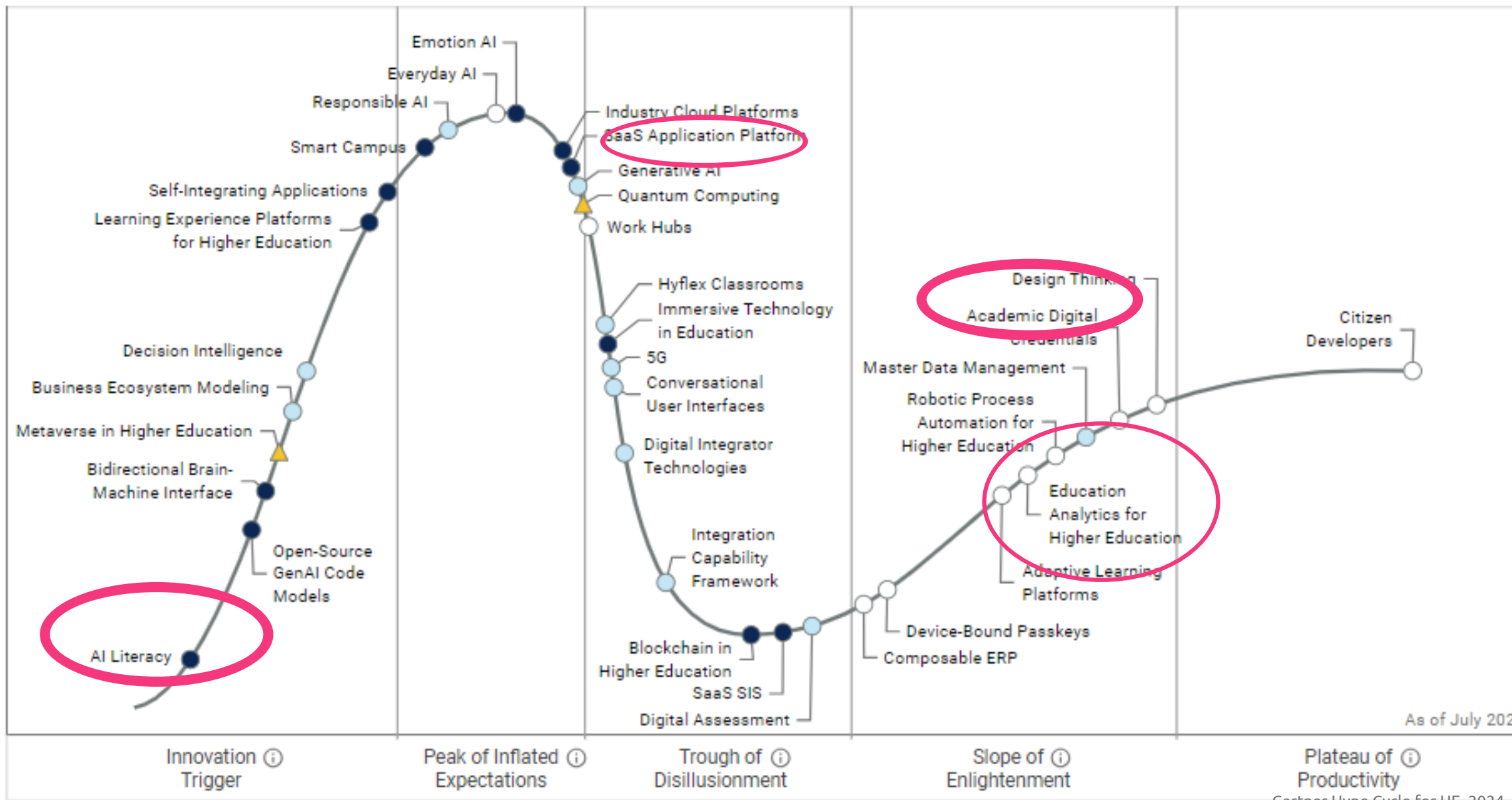
Gartner Hype Cycle for HE, 2024
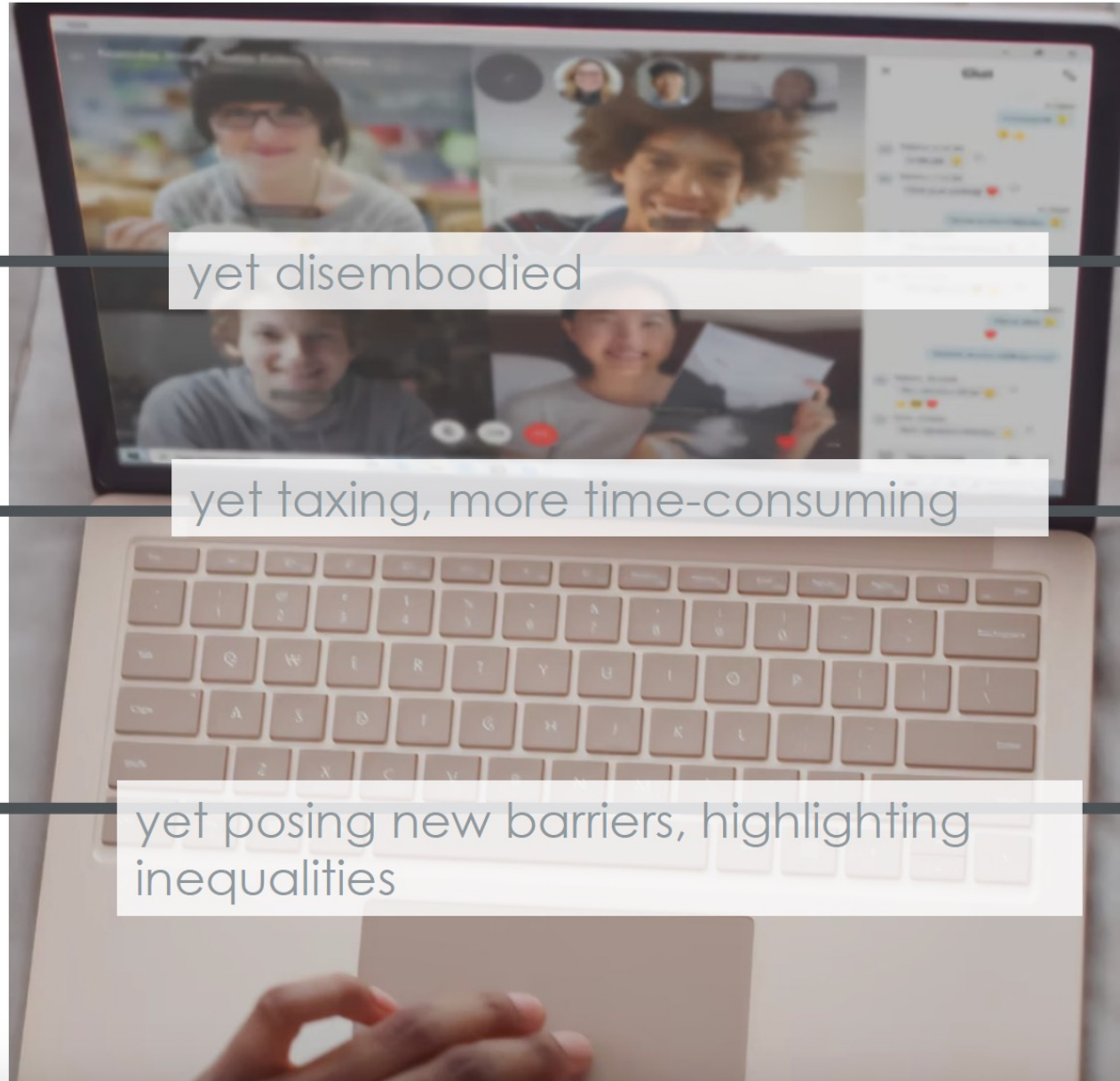
Intimate, social   yet disembodied

Self-paced, flexible   yet taxing, more time-consuming

Accessible to all   yet posing new barriers, highlighting inequalities

Open discussion:

What are your biggest challenges/concerns about the QA of open/online/distance/blended learning?

The current state of
QA frameworks on
different modes of
delivery

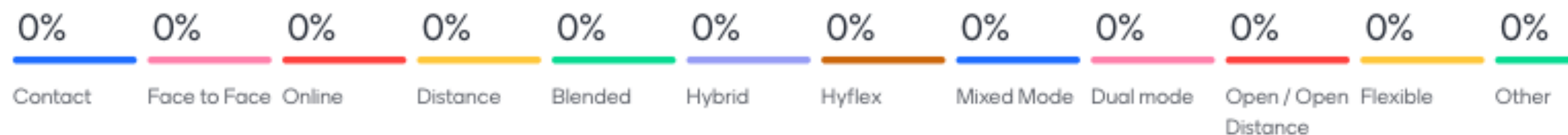| Framework	Region	Description	Approach to ODL, Online Learning, E-learning, Blended Learning, etc.
African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA)	Africa	ASG-QA provides a set of standards for internal and external QA in African higher education institutions. It promotes continuous quality improvement, mutual trust, and student mobility within Africa.	**Defines** ODL and blended learning broadly as **flexible,** distance, and blended models for student learning
African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM) Link	Africa	AQRM supports self-assessment and peer reviews in African HEIs. It aims to compare performance against common criteria to enhance QA and foster continuous improvement.	**Does not specifically define** these terms, but emphasises **flexible** learning approaches.
European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) Link	Europe	ESG provide a common framework for QA in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). It emphasizes student-centered learning and transparency in QA processes.	Encourages blended and online learning. **E-learning is explicitly defined as comparable in quality to traditional face-to-face education.**
Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN) Quality Standards	Asia	APQN provides quality standards and procedures for higher education in the Asia-Pacific region. It promotes collaboration, capacity building, and QA across diverse higher education systems, integrating ODL and flexible learning pathways.	Explicitly defines **ODL and blended learning as flexible methods** to expand access and promote **lifelong learning** in the region.
Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) Link	North America (USA)	CHEA recognises accrediting organisations, ensuring that quality assurance processes in higher education meet established standards.	Recognises and encourages **diverse** educational delivery methods, including online and distance learning. These modes of delivery **must meet the same standards as traditional education.**
MERCOSUR Educational Sector Quality Framework	**South America**	MERCOSUR's educational framework promotes mutual recognition of higher education qualifications across its member countries, supporting student mobility and ensuring comparability of standards between traditional and distance education modes.	Promotes **ODL and blended learning, with explicit definitions,** to enhance education access, particularly in rural regions.

Mentimeter

What are the official terms that your institution uses to describe the modes of delivery of your programmes?

What are the official terms that your institution uses to describe the modes of delivery of your programmes?

0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Contact	Face to Face	Online	Distance	Blended	Hybrid	Hyflex	Mixed Mode	Dual mode	Open / Open Distance	Flexible	Other

Discrepancies and tensions

- **Europe** (ESG, QAA) tends to use "blended learning" more broadly.

- **US** frameworks (CHEA) may distinguish between hybrid (combined online and face-to-face learning) and hyflex (giving students choice between synchronous and asynchronous learning).

- **African** frameworks (ASG-QA, AQRM) focus more on "distance learning" without extensively distinguishing between these newer forms of flexible learning.

- **African and South American frameworks**, like the ASG-QA and SINEACE, tend to be more focused binary modes (ODL and contact learning) with less explicit promotion of e.g. hyflex.

Breakout rooms:

Is there a need for standardised definitions of different modes of deliveries,

- Internationally,

- Regionally

- Institutionally?

Why/why not?

There is a level of *general* consistency...

Key terms

Blended Learning	Combines online digital content with traditional face-to-face classroom activities, offering flexible learning options.
Hybrid Learning	Similar to above, but often involves more complex integration of online and face-to-face methods, allowing for flexible transitions between the two.
Hyflex Learning	A hybrid-flexible model where students choose between attending classes in person, participating online synchronously, or accessing materials asynchronously.
Synchronous	Real-time learning where students and instructors interact at the same time, typically in a live online session or physical classroom.
Asynchronous	Allows students to access learning materials/activities and lectures at their own time, without real-time interaction.
ODL (Open and Distance Learning)	Allows students to learn at a distance, often with minimal physical interaction with instructors or peers.
Online/E-Learning	Education delivered through digital platforms, often involving a virtual classroom or LMS
Distance Learning	Broad term for education where lecturers & students are separated by time and/or space, typically involving remote communication methods.
Contact Learning	Traditional, face-to-face learning. Takes place in a physical classroom with direct lecturer-student interaction.
Self-paced	Students progress through course materials at their own speed, without strict deadlines or a fixed schedule. Often involves primarily asynchronous engagements with lecturers/peers, or non-mandatory live engagements.
Instructor-led / Prescribed pace	A structured approach where the educator sets a predefined schedule for content delivery, assessments, and deadlines. often includes real-time interaction, such as live lectures.

Let's take a break….

A practical approach

Typical broad standards

1. Clarity on the mode

2. Institutional responsiveness

3. Institutional preparedness

4. Issues of integrity

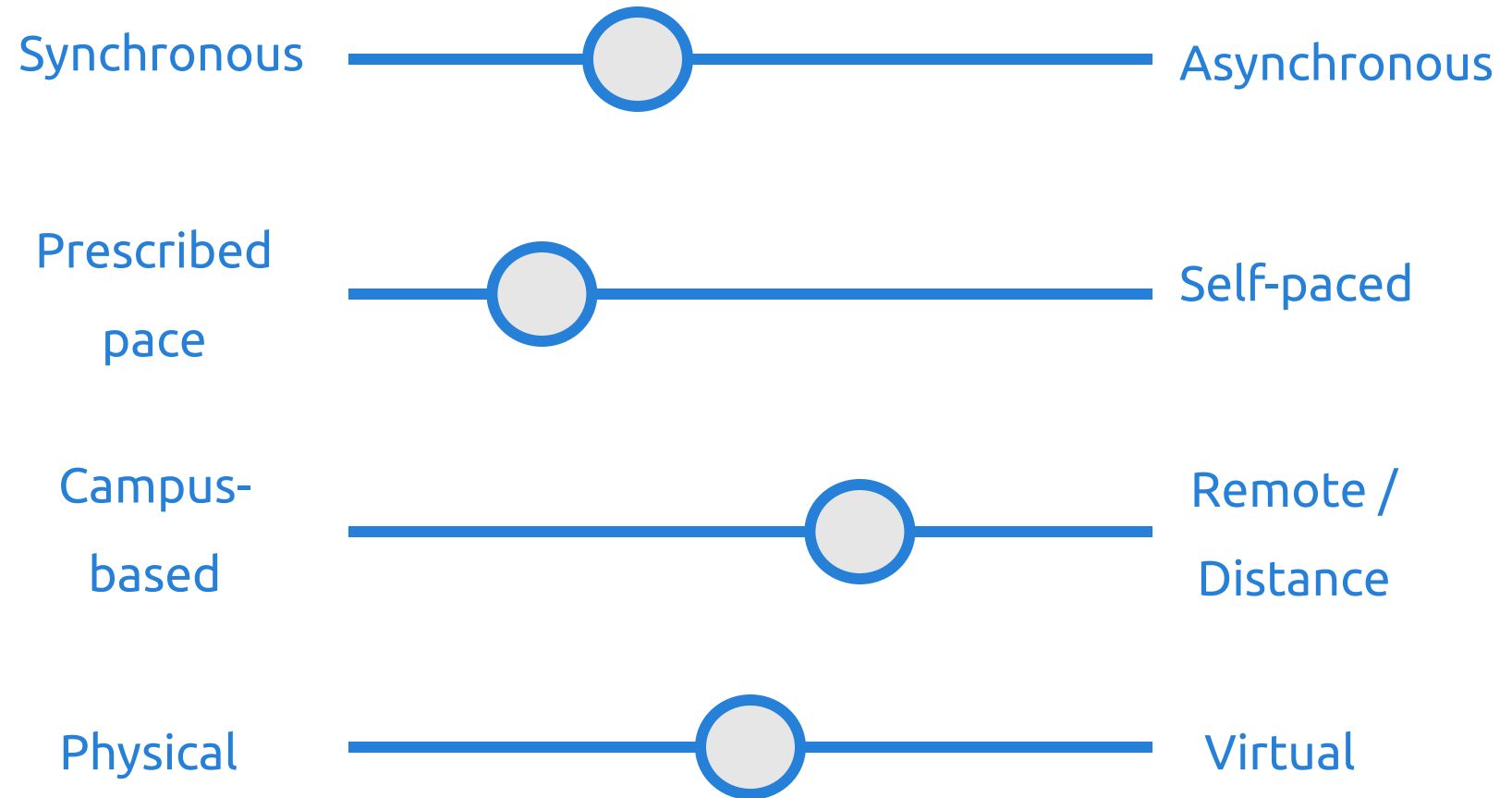# 1. Map your mode(s) of delivery, based on sliding scales of time-place-pace

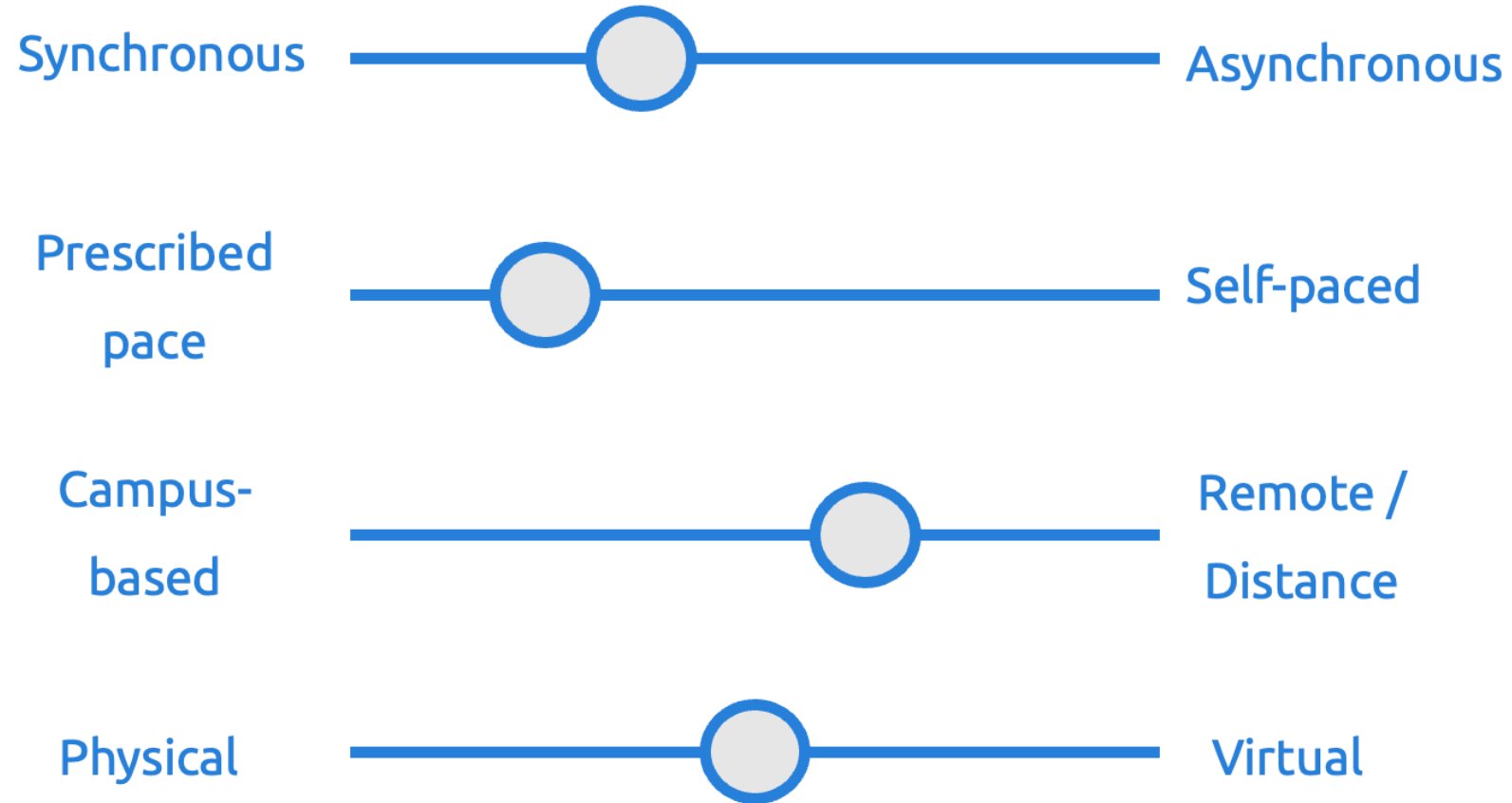|		
Models	**Blended Learning**	Combines online digital content with traditional face-to-face classroom activities, offering flexible learning options.
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	Instructor-led / Prescribed pace	A structured approach where the educator sets a predefined schedule for content delivery, assessments, and deadlines. often includes real-time interaction, such as live lectures.

Example (broad) standard:

Clarity on the model

Map your institutions' modes of provision according to time, place and pace

Synchronous ———●——————— Asynchronous

Prescribed pace ——●————————— Self-paced

Campus-based ————————●——— Remote / Distance

Physical ————————●———— Virtual

Adapted from: South African Council on Higher Education (CHE)'s *Higher Education Practice Standard for Modes of Learning and Teaching Provision*

Synchronous	———⬤———————	Asynchronous
Prescribed pace	——⬤—————————	Self-paced
Campus-based	———————⬤———	Remote / Distance
Physical	—————⬤—————	Virtual

2. Unpack a standard/criterion in more detail, based on your institutional identity

Example (broad) standard:

Responsiveness

To *our* context

Global disruptions (e.g. climate change)

Changing world of work

Regulatory context

(local, regional, international)

To the needs & expectations of *our* students

Students with disabilities

Need for multilingualism / specific language of provision

Various level of access to digital resources / reliable Wi-Fi

Need for campus experience of contact / flexibility of online

To emerging technologies that affect *us*

Artificial Intelligence

Security and Privacy Risks associated with digital databases

3. Craft reflexive questions

Example (broad) standard:
Preparedness

Staff

What steps has our institution taken to ensure staff are skilled in using emerging technologies and designing innovative learning experiences?

Students

To what extent does the institution cater for and support the development of student competencies (academic digital literacies) for our modes of delivery?

Institution

How is support offered for students and staff, to ensure they have access to (and understand how to use) technology resources, and the LMS? What evidence is collected to show effectiveness of this support?

4. Identify and respond to the gaps

Example (broad) standard:

Integrity

Ethical teaching, learning and assessment

For example:

> We need to develop a **curriculum planning "blueprint"** that ensures that the course is intentionally designed with the mode of delivery in mind.

> We need to create a **detailed student profile** to assess whether the chosen mode of provision and associated tools (e.g. proctoring software) enable inclusivity and accessibility.

> We need to **refine our IT strategy** to protect curriculum- and assessment-related data (e.g. learning analytics, student research outputs).

Map your institutions' modes of provision according to time, place and pace.

Unpack key considerations (or the QA standards / criteria) in more detail, to align with your institutional identity.

Draft reflexive **questions**, rather than only engaging in a 'tick box' exercise.

Consider the gaps the reflexive questions highlighted (current state). What transparent **processes** should be put in place to address these on a continual basis?

Open Discussion

Thank you

Mine.deklerk@eduvos.com