

Leading with **SCALE**

A framework for resilient
digital higher education

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- *Erin Jancauskas*
Chief Academic and
Partnerships Officer, OES

Executive summary

The **SCALE** framework: Building future-ready digital education

Higher education stands at a defining moment. Institutions face increasing pressure to evolve and prove their value in an era where students are more digitally fluent, more discerning, and more demanding of flexible, relevant learning experiences.

Yet many institutions still struggle to transform sustainably. Legacy systems and limited resources often collide with the pace and complexity of digital transformation. The result is misalignment between mission and method, between technology and pedagogy, and between ambition and capacity.

SCALE offers a way forward. It is a practical, adaptable framework for building sustainable, learner-focused digital ecosystems.

Developed through years of collaboration with higher education partners, **SCALE** distills the principles, processes, and practices that turn digital ambition into enduring institutional capability.



Dr Erin Jancauskas
Chief Academic and
Partnerships Officer, OES

Foreword

Higher education is entering a new phase of maturity in digital learning. What was once exploratory is now essential. Institutions are being asked to deliver flexible, high-quality learning experiences at scale while navigating financial pressure and rising learner expectations. In Australia and globally, this shift is accelerating as online and blended delivery move from the margins to the core of institutional strategy. At the same time, the opportunity is significant. When designed with intent, digital education can expand reach and extend the impact of institutional missions.

At its core, the challenge is how to grow digital capability with clarity and control. Too often, institutions move quickly without the structures needed to sustain quality. Initiatives are launched in isolation, and both governance models as well as delivery systems struggle to keep pace with ambition. Sustainable progress requires a different approach. It should bring strategy, academic leadership, operational delivery, and quality assurance into alignment from the outset. And that means creating conditions where academic staff are true partners in design, and where systems are built to support both rigour and responsiveness over time.

SCALE is designed to support that shift. It brings together the critical elements required to build digital education that is both effective and enduring. What distinguishes the framework is its integration. Strategic intent is directly connected to execution. Collaboration is embedded, not assumed. Speed is enabled, but never at the expense of quality.

Innovation is approached deliberately, particularly as institutions consider the role of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence across teaching and operations.

These dynamics are already shaping the decisions leaders must make across the sector. Institutions are determining how to scale programmes, how to support academic staff, and how to ensure that growth does not compromise standards or student experience. Those that succeed will be the ones that treat digital learning not as a series of initiatives, but as a coordinated, institution-wide capability that is designed to evolve. They will deliver learning that is purposeful, well-supported, and responsive to the needs of diverse learners.

SCALE offers a shared foundation for that work.

It is intended to support the conversations and decisions taking place across executive teams, academic leadership, and governance bodies. Ultimately, this is about building the capability to move with confidence. Our goal is to ensure that institutions can expand access, maintain quality, and continue to serve learners and society with integrity and purpose.

Dr Erin Jancauskas

Chief Academic and Partnerships Officer, OES



SCALE reflects more than 14 years of hands-on experience designing, delivering, and evolving digital learning with our partners across Australia and globally. Through this process, we engaged closely with academic and design teams at every level. These experiences have shaped a practical view of what it takes to deliver high-quality online learning, consistently and at scale.

David Robertson

Director of Learning Design, OES

The five pillars of SCALE

Each pillar represents an essential component of a resilient, future-ready education model:



Strategy first

Align digital transformation with institutional purpose and learner needs.



Learner-centric quality

Embed engagement, clarity, inclusion, authenticity, and social learning as non-negotiables.



Collaborative design

Build trust and ownership through authentic faculty partnership.



Evergreen innovation

Design systems that adapt, evolve, and integrate technology responsibly, including AI.



Agile execution

Deliver efficiently through iterative, quality-driven processes.

Together, these pillars underpin both a methodology and a mindset. **SCALE** helps institutions move beyond reaction and disruption towards a deliberate, repeatable way of working that unites academic purpose with operational agility.

Why SCALE matters

Institutions that embrace the **SCALE** mindset are not simply adapting to change—they are shaping the future of education. By applying its principles, universities and colleges have:

- **Launched** new programmes on compressed timelines without compromising academic rigour.
- **Empowered** faculty as co-creators, not just content contributors.
- **Embedded** learner engagement, accessibility, and authenticity at the heart of course design.
- **Built** adaptable systems that reduce long-term costs and increase responsiveness to emerging needs.

CHAPTER 1



Strategy First

Aligning digital transformation
with purpose

Aligning digital transformation with purpose

We begin where all successful digital transformations must start: strategy.

Too often, institutions rush into digital initiatives without anchoring them to their broader mission or the evolving needs of their learners. And too often this results in misaligned projects, stretched timelines, unclear ROI, and disengaged stakeholders. To be sustainable and meaningful, digital transformation must begin with strategy. And a strong digital learning strategy starts with institutional purpose.

When that purpose is clear, and when it's tied to the lived experiences and expectations of today's students, strategy becomes a catalyst for innovation.

Research snapshot

- Australia's Universities Accord sets a national ambition to lift tertiary attainment from 60% to 80% by 2050, positioning higher education as central to long-term economic and social outcomes. (Department of Education)
- In the 2024 Student Experience Survey, fully online undergraduates reported higher overall satisfaction (79.8%) than internal and multi-modal students (76.1%), challenging assumptions about online quality. (QILT)
- The sector is moving beyond a focus on online growth towards flexible, multi-modal, and increasingly personalised learning models, enabled by digital technologies and AI to meet diverse learner needs. (Future Disruptions for Australian Universities)



Key elements of a mission-aligned strategy

Following years of experience delivering online learning experiences, we have found that institutions leading successful digital transformations often share the following strategic traits:

- **Mission clarity:** They define how online programmes support institutional goals, from enrolment growth and workforce alignment to impact and expertise.
- **Learner alignment:** They prioritise flexibility, relevance, and access, and they try to understand how these could apply to nontraditional and digitally native students.
- **Stakeholder engagement:** They establish shared ownership across academic leadership, faculty, learning design teams, and IT from the outset.
- **Sustainability planning:** Their assessments stretch beyond the cost of development, and reach into the long-term effort needed to maintain quality and relevance at **scale**.

Institutions that apply these principles allow strategy to become the engine of innovation, and a shared cultural purpose that underpins digital transformation and growth.



Common pitfalls and how to avoid them

Even well-resourced institutions encounter recurring barriers that undermine strategic thinking and execution. We have observed patterns across dozens of higher education projects that reveal three common themes:

- **Treating online as a direct transfer of on-campus experiences:**
One-size-fits-all replication leads to weak learner engagement. Online is a distinct modality that requires distinct design.
- **Underestimating faculty workload and support needs:**
Expecting educators to carry design, production, and delivery burdens without time, training, or tools sets initiatives up for failure.
- **Siloed decision-making:**
When academic leadership, teaching staff, and technology teams operate on different timelines or with different assumptions, alignment breaks down. Assumptions and miscommunications creep in, and these can snowball dramatically.

“Many universities think what they’re doing on the ground should translate directly online. That’s the biggest misconception. Institutions need to understand online learning as a distinct educational approach, requiring different skills and strategies to engage learners effectively.

“Online learning requires specific pedagogical practices, whether for synchronous courses or designing online interactions like breakout rooms and digital polling. If faculty only lecture the same way that they do traditionally, students online quickly disengage. The learning objectives, assignments, and assessments might remain the same, but the online student engagement strategy is drastically different.”

**- Dr. Christine Levinson, IB MYP Educator,
Pan American School**



Lessons from the field

While no two institutions are alike, in our experience, several consistent practices have emerged as predictors of **SCALE**-able success:

- **Conduct pre-design consultations to align from day one:**
Bringing key academic and administrative stakeholders into the conversation before design work begins creates a shared vision and reduces the risk of misalignment later. Early dialogue clarifies priorities and uncovers potential constraints. It also ensures the design process is rooted in a common understanding, which lays the groundwork for better and more resilient outcomes further down the line.
- **Prioritise programmes with the highest impact:**
Focusing initial efforts on flagship or high-enrolment courses ensures that digital transformation is both highly visible and strategically valuable. By starting where institutional stakes are highest, teams can demonstrate early success, build momentum, and create case studies that inspire broader adoption.
- **Set success metrics from the outset:**
Defining clear, measurable KPIs ensures that progress is tracked against both key deliverables and meaningful outcomes. These benchmarks keep the project focused on impact, enabling data-driven refinements that strengthen results over time. Common KPIs include student engagement rates, satisfaction scores, and course completion percentages.

These insights reflect hard-won lessons from institutions that have successfully aligned digital efforts with strategic priorities—not through flash-in-the-pan initiatives, but through intentional, values-driven planning.



A globally ranked Australian Group of Eight university partnered with OES to reimagine its online portfolio. While academically renowned, its model remained traditional, and leadership saw an opportunity to reach new students and meet evolving expectations.

Expanding online required a deliberate, evidence-based approach to protect reputation and align with long-term goals.

- Build a purposeful, high-quality online portfolio
- Ground programme selection in student demand and employment outcomes
- Shift from incremental change to long-term growth
- Align stakeholders around a shared vision

The approach

OES partnered with university leaders to bring clarity and momentum to decision-making, focusing on where student need, employment demand, and institutional strengths intersected. Key elements included:

- Analysis of student demand, labour market trends, and competitors
- Identification of high-potential online disciplines
- Stakeholder workshops to challenge assumptions and build alignment
- Clear articulation of risks, trade-offs, and opportunities

Students remained central throughout, ensuring recommendations enhanced access, flexibility, and outcomes.

The results

With alignment and a strong evidence base, the university moved quickly towards transformation.

Key outcomes included:

- Selection of three priority degree programmes for launch
- A roadmap for sustainable domestic and international growth
- Increased internal alignment and confidence
- Stronger positioning as a global online education leader

By grounding decisions in data and a commitment to student success, the university significantly expanded its reach and continues to grow in the online education space.

The leadership team clarified the programme's mission: to expand workforce-aligned credentials in health sciences.



Learning designers mapped how content could be structured to maintain rigour while supporting flexibility.

Faculty defined learner outcomes, emphasising applied knowledge and industry relevance.



IT identified infrastructure gaps that needed to be addressed before scale-up.



Leadership questions for vice-chancellors and provosts

This short questionnaire provides high-gain questions senior leaders can use in retreats, strategy sessions and board briefings. These prompts reveal gaps in readiness and alignment.

- If we had to brief the board on our online portfolio performance tomorrow, what would we say?
- Which five programmes are our strongest near-term online growth bets, and why?
- What percentage of our online courses meet our own quality standard?
- Are we leveraging student and market insights to inform our programme uplifts and redesigns?
- Where are the largest risks in our current online operations (governance, quality, speed, faculty trust)?
- What would we do differently if we had to double our online enrolment within two years?





SCALE Strategy Readiness Checklist

Assessing institutional alignment for digital transformation

Use this quick self-assessment to evaluate how well your institution is positioned to place Strategy First, the foundational pillar of SCALE. This resource helps leaders identify strengths and gaps across crucial areas before investing time and resources in digital transformation initiatives.

Mission alignment

Have we defined how digital learning supports our institutional mission and strategic priorities?

Do we know which programmes should be prioritised for maximum impact?

Learner focus

Do we understand the needs of nontraditional and digitally native students?

Have we identified how flexibility, access, and relevance will be built into the design?

Stakeholder engagement

Are faculty, administrators, IT, and design teams all represented in early planning?

Do stakeholders share ownership of outcomes, not just deliverables?

Sustainability

Have we planned for ongoing content updates, not just initial delivery?

Are resources in place to maintain quality and relevance at **scale**?

Leaders who can confidently check most of these boxes are well-positioned to put Strategy First into practice.

CHAPTER 2



Collaborative Design

Building with faculty buy-in

Collaboration matters

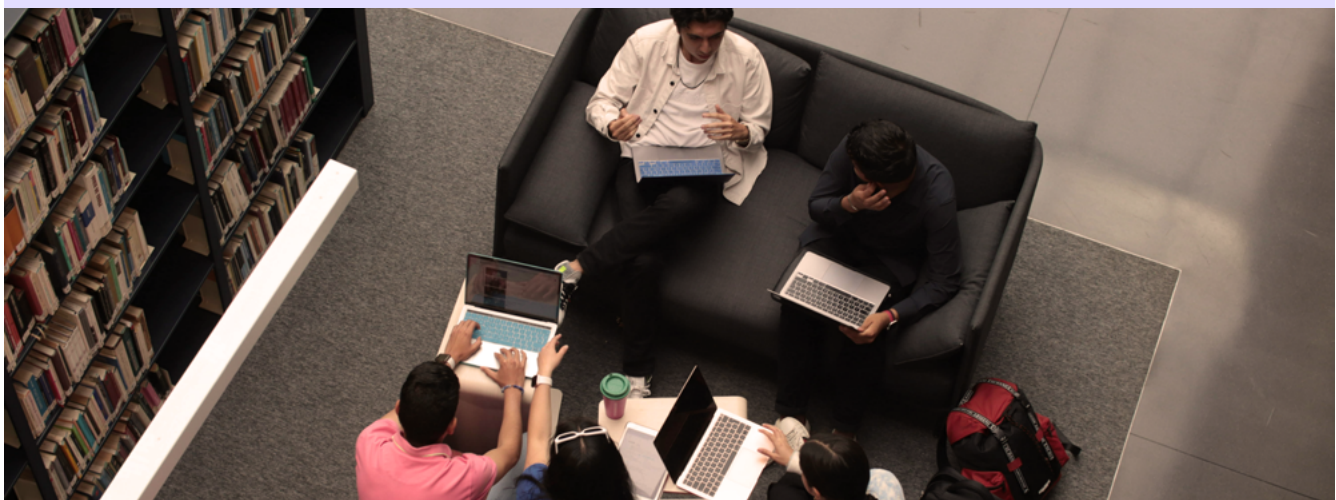
Digital transformation in higher education succeeds when strategic intent is supported by collaborative execution. Faculty and academic stakeholders are essential partners in designing effective online learning, but too often their involvement is treated as a formality rather than a cornerstone of success.

When collaboration is authentic and early, resistance becomes engagement, and engagement becomes ownership. Institutions that prioritise co-design see stronger pedagogical outcomes, quicker and deeper faculty buy-in, and ultimately more sustainable adoption of digital learning practices.

Research snapshot

- Flexible delivery is now embedded in the system, with online and multi-modal study accounting for over half of enrolments across Australian higher education. (TEQSA / QILT)
- Online learning plays a critical role in widening participation, with students from equity groups - low SES, regional and remote, and First Nations - more likely to study externally. (TEQSA / QILT)
- While flexibility enables access and lifelong learning pathways, external students consistently report lower levels of peer engagement and connection, highlighting the importance of building online environments that are designed for connection. (QILT)

Insight: As participation expands, institutions must design for connection, belonging, and support—not just access.



Understanding the roots of faculty resistance

Faculty hesitation around digital transformation is rarely about technology alone. It is often rooted in deeper concerns:

- **Time and workload pressure:** Faculty already balancing teaching, research, and service may view course design as an unmanageable additional burden.
- **Loss of autonomy:** There is fear that digital course templates will dilute academic freedom or compromise subject matter nuance.
- **Lack of familiarity with digital pedagogy:** Many instructors are experts in their fields but lack experience with online teaching tools, environments, or learning design processes.

“Faculty often come from very academic backgrounds and struggle to translate their expertise into engaging online experiences. Many try to replicate the classroom environment but simply don’t know where to start—what platforms or tools to use, or how to structure their content effectively. Our role is to guide them through that process.”

- Cari Coetzee, *Learning Strategist, OES Learning Solutions*



Principles of effective collaboration

Institutions that successfully engage faculty in digital transformation adopt practices rooted in partnership:

- **Start with discovery:** Listening sessions that explore faculty goals, teaching styles, and learner needs lay the foundation for trust and alignment.
- **Communicate transparently:** Clear expectations about time commitments, milestones, and feedback cycles reduce anxiety and improve participation.
- **Respect expertise:** Faculty should see their subject matter knowledge as central, rather than secondary, to course design.

These considerations lay the foundation for one of the most important aspects of digital evolution: **co-ownership**.

Research snapshot

- A significant engagement gap persists: external undergraduates report peer engagement at 22.3%, compared with 65.0% for internal and multi-modal students. (QILT)
- TEQSA guidance on generative AI requires institutions to address staff capability, student guidance, and governance, reinforcing that educators must remain central as practices evolve. (TEQSA)
- The Castlereagh Statement calls for collaborative curriculum and assessment design, with technology used transparently in service of pedagogy, trust, and human outcomes. (Castlereagh Statement)

Insight: Improving engagement and belonging in digital environments depends on intentional, human-centred co-design across educators, learners, and institutions.

When faculty feel like **co-owners**, digital transformation stops feeling like a mandate and starts being seen as a shared win

Practical tactics that build buy-in

Our approach to collaborative design is informed by direct experience working with faculty and by best practices we have observed in institutions fostering meaningful academic partnerships.

Some proven approaches include:

- **Shared design frameworks with space for personalisation**
Templates ensure consistency without stripping away faculty voice.
- **Early and rapid prototyping**
Preliminary examples (scripts, modules, assets) allow timely, specific feedback.
- **Faculty champions**
Internal advocates inspire peers and shift perceptions from scepticism to opportunity.
- **Structured onboarding**
Walkthroughs, toolkits, and workshops clarify expectations and build confidence from day one.

Co-design in practice: what success looks like

Institutions that adopt co-design often report:

- More confident and engaged faculty during and after the process.
- Reduced delays in content provision and approvals.
- Increased quality and coherence across course portfolios.

Case study

Turning pressure into progress

In one project, a university set out to redesign an entire degree programme online. At first, faculty were reluctant: some feared loss of autonomy, others felt overwhelmed by the added workload. Leadership worried the resistance would stall the timeline.

Instead of pushing forward, the team introduced a co-design process:

- Faculty were invited into early discovery workshops to share their goals and concerns.
- Course asset prototypes were created quickly, helping faculty see how their material would translate into engaging digital formats.
- A handful of early adopters were spotlighted, showing peers that online teaching could preserve academic rigour while expanding reach.



“Faculty buy-in comes from respect and collaboration. When they see how their expertise contributes directly to student success, they engage fully. That’s why co-design is essential.”

- Celeste Bruwer, Sales Enablement Manager, OES Learning Solutions

The results

Faculty who initially resisted became some of the strongest advocates, encouraging colleagues to join. By the end of the project, what began as scepticism had shifted into shared ownership. This case illustrates that collaboration is not a box to check—it is the foundation for cultural change.



SCALE Collaborative Design Readiness Checklist

Evaluating Institutional Capacity for Faculty Partnership

This checklist helps institutions gauge their readiness to engage faculty as genuine partners in the digital transformation process. Use it to identify where deeper listening, clearer communication, or structured governance can strengthen buy-in and move faculty from resistance to ownership.

Discovery & alignment

Have we conducted listening sessions with faculty to understand their goals and concerns?

Do we have a shared governance model for decision-making?

Transparency & trust

Are expectations about workload, timelines, and deliverables clear?

Do faculty understand how their contributions will directly impact learners?

Support & advocacy

Do faculty champions exist to advocate for the process internally?

Have we created toolkits, prototypes, or workshops to build early confidence?

Institutions checking most of these boxes are primed to build collaboration that lasts.

CHAPTER 3



Agile Execution

Moving fast without
breaking quality

What agility really means

Once institutions have alignment and faculty engagement in place, the next challenge is execution. Delivering high-quality online courses at scale (and usually under time pressure) requires careful planning and one of the cultural pillars and operational practices we're most proud of at OES: agility.

Agile execution does not mean hasty delivery. It means adopting flexible, iterative processes that allow for rapid progress, continuous improvement, and uncompromising quality. Institutions that approach execution with agility are better equipped to manage the stacked pressures of tight timelines compounded by complex academic calendars and shifting stakeholder needs.

Research snapshot

- Australian higher education faces sustained uncertainty across technology, workforce demand, funding, demographics, and geopolitics over the next decade. (Department of Education)
- The Universities Accord highlights that traditional, linear planning and delivery models are poorly suited to this environment and limit institutional responsiveness. (Department of Education)

Insight: Agile, modular programme design and coordinated execution across academic, digital, and governance functions are becoming core capabilities for resilience.



Why traditional timelines fall short

When digital education projects stall or underperform, it's often because they follow rigid, linear workflows that are ill-suited to the realities of higher education. Delays in content approvals and evolving course requirements, or unexpected faculty absences, can all derail static project plans.

By contrast, agile methodologies allow teams to:

- **Divide (and conquer!)** work into manageable phases or “sprints”
- **Collect** and apply feedback throughout the process
- **Keep** multiple course development streams in motion simultaneously
- **Adjust** priorities in real time without losing momentum

While efficiency is important, this approach is about more than just smooth sailing. It builds in resilience by anticipating change, absorbing disruption, and keeping progress on track.

“Rushing through phases almost always creates problems later. When we take the time to follow a structured process, outcomes are consistently better. Explaining and demonstrating each step helps faculty see the bigger picture, reduces confusion, and builds confidence in the final product.”

Core practices for agile delivery in higher ed

Agile course development in higher education looks different from its software development roots. Agile in higher ed trades speed for structure: adapting to academic calendars, faculty rhythms, and the need for collaboration without compromising flexibility. In fact, it prioritises flexibility without compromising academic rigour.

Key practices are included below.

- **Sprint-based course development enables progress in waves:** Breaking courses into discrete components—such as welcome messages, weekly modules, or assessments—allows teams to move forward incrementally. Faculty can review, refine, and approve each piece on a rolling basis, creating a steady flow of progress and reducing bottlenecks.
- **Parallel workstreams keep development moving:** Rather than waiting for each step to be complete before starting the next, our teams work concurrently across design, media production, and quality assurance. This overlapping workflow compresses timelines and ensures that no stage becomes a blocker.
- **Proof-of-concept prototypes reduce ambiguity early:** Initial samples—whether a module layout, a storyboard, or a draft video—help stakeholders visualise the final product and provide targeted input early in the process. These prototypes align expectations, reduce revision cycles, and boost confidence across the project team.
- **Regular review cadence builds trust and momentum:** Instead of relying on a single, high-stakes review at the end of development, we engage faculty and project leads in regular feedback cycles. These short, focused check-ins ensure decisions are made quickly, issues are caught early, and everyone stays aligned.

Agile in higher ed trades speed for structure: adapting to academic calendars, faculty rhythms, and the need for collaboration without compromising flexibility.

Institutions embracing these practices report **shorter time-to-launch** due to fewer downstream revisions, as well as higher consistency across courses.



Balancing speed with standards

A core tenet of agile execution, particularly in the case of learning design, is that quality cannot be sacrificed for the sake of speed. Every phase, from storyboarding to assessments, must meet institutional and pedagogical standards.

This is achieved through:

- **Layered quality assurance:** Each asset (text, media, interactions) undergoes multiple rounds of review before deployment.
- **Cross-functional collaboration:** Learning designers, producers, and QA specialists work in tandem to ensure every piece aligns to goals.
- **Accessibility and responsiveness testing:** Courses are validated across devices and against WCAG 2.0 AA standards to ensure usability for all learners.

Benefits for senior leaders

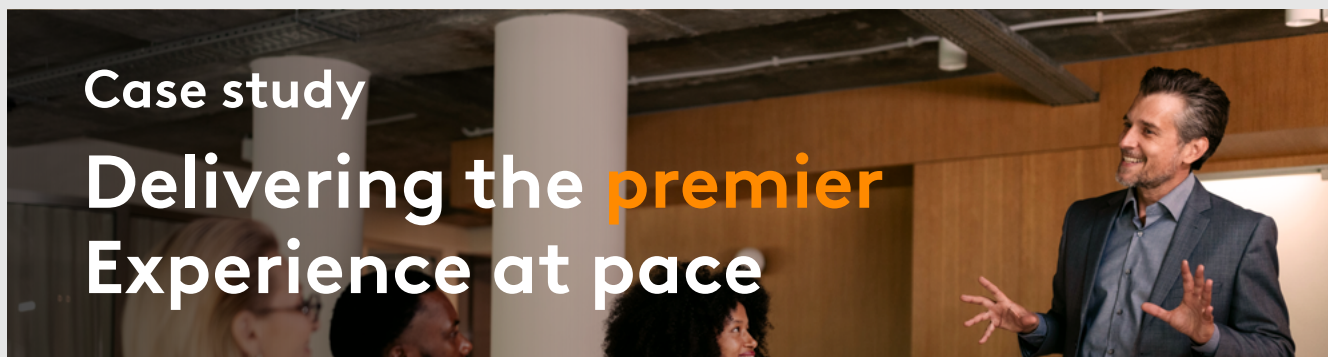
Consistency at scale starts with clear standards. Establishing visual style guides and early proof-of-concept edits enables teams to templatised assets so multiple editors can work in parallel while maintaining quality.

Agile execution delivers:

- **More predictable timelines** for boards and external partners
- **Earlier visibility into risks** and dependencies
- **Better use** of scarce faculty and staff time
- **Reduced rework** and fewer emergency fixes
- **Higher on-time launch** rates, even under tight deadlines

This approach supports high-volume production without compromising the creative vision.

Agility means not having to reinvent the wheel. Standardised workflows, templated assets, and shared project dashboards allow institutions to scale efficiently while preserving academic identity.



A globally renowned business school faced a high-stakes delivery challenge: move its flagship MBA and Executive MBA programmes into a digital format quickly, without compromising the rigour or reputation associated with a premier institution. Timelines were tight and expectations were high.

Instead of treating the project as one large, high-risk build, the team used a phased rollout:

- Prioritization aligned delivery with cohort launch dates.
- Course homepages and overviews were launched early to create clear student entry points.
- Full asynchronous content, interactive modules, assessments, and multimedia assets moved through structured review and QA before deployment.
- Accessibility, mobile responsiveness, demos, internal review, and client sign-off were built into rapid sprint cycles.

The results

Between September 2020 and March 2021, more than 25 full course builds were completed, meeting every key academic milestone. The phased delivery model allowed multiple streams of work to move forward at once.

The result was a seamless digital experience: flexible enough for global learners, rigorous enough for a world-class business school, and structured enough to support faculty and internal teams through a major transition. This case illustrates agile execution in action: speed with discipline, quality with cadence, and delivery without compromise.



SCALE Agile Execution Checklist

Ensuring speed, structure, and quality in course development

Agile execution allows institutions to move quickly without compromising academic rigour. This checklist highlights the essential components of sprint-based development, workflow design, quality safeguards, and faculty experience—supporting teams in delivering high-quality courses under real-world timelines.

Workflow design

Do we break large projects into sprints with incremental deliverables?

Are we running design, media, and QA in parallel rather than sequentially?

Faculty engagement

Do faculty have opportunities to review prototypes early in the process?

Are regular, short review cycles built into the development plan?

Quality safeguards

Do we apply layered QA across all assets before launch?

Are accessibility and mobile-readiness checks part of every project, not just the final stage?

Adaptability

Can priorities be shifted mid-project without derailing the overall timeline?

Do we have processes in place to absorb unexpected delays (faculty availability, changing requirements)?

Leaders who check most of these boxes are already embedding agility into their institutions. Those with gaps may find themselves facing avoidable delays or quality issues when projects **scale** up.

CHAPTER 4



Learner-centric Quality:

Designing for engagement,
equity, and impact

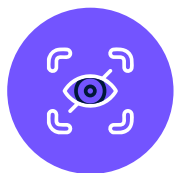
The five pillars of learner-centric quality

Institutions achieving consistent quality at scale tend to apply a shared framework. These five interrelated pillars serve as foundational principles for designing online courses that engage learners and meet institutional standards.



Engagement

Courses must spark curiosity and maintain momentum. This is achieved through timely and personalised feedback, active learning elements, and instructor presence that helps learners feel motivated and connected.



Clarity

A well-structured course reduces cognitive load, allowing students to focus on learning rather than navigating. Clear instructions, consistent layouts, and transparent assessment criteria make expectations obvious and reduce uncertainty.



Inclusion

Universal design principles ensure accessibility for all students, including those with disabilities or varied technological access. Inclusive design also anticipates diverse learning preferences and needs.



Authenticity

Learning is most powerful when it feels relevant. We weave real-world applications into the curriculum through case studies, scenario-based challenges, and industry-relevant projects. That way, learners can see immediate value in what they're learning.



Connected learning experiences

Community is a catalyst for deeper understanding. Structured opportunities for peer collaboration and knowledge-sharing turn learning into a shared (and more effective) journey. Opportunities for collaboration need to be prioritised and built into an online curriculum.

Quality frameworks in practice

Institutions adopting this framework have found success by translating high-level goals into consistent course-level decisions. Common approaches include:

- **Collaborative** development of style guides and templates to reinforce consistency.
- **Iterative** feedback loops with faculty to refine both content and delivery.
- **Centralised** review processes for media, assessments, and accessibility compliance.

Research snapshot

- The Higher Education Standards Framework establishes consistent expectations for teaching quality, learning environments, and governance across all delivery modes. (TEQSA)
- Flexible study is now structural: around 22% of domestic undergraduates study fully online and 29% in multi-modal formats, with equity cohorts overrepresented in these modes. (ACSES)
- External students report comparable or slightly higher satisfaction with teaching quality, but significantly weaker peer engagement and sense of belonging. (ACSES / QILT)

Insight: As access expands through flexible delivery, institutions must apply the same rigour to connection, belonging, and social learning as they do to teaching quality.

By aligning learning design and media teams around shared standards, institutions avoid the quality drift that often accompanies fast-paced development and helps them to focus on the learner experience throughout.

Balancing scale with quality

The assumption that scaling course production comes at the expense of quality seems logical but it is far from inevitable. In fact, agile and high-quality development can co-exist when supported by the right frameworks and practices.

Key strategies are included below:

- **Template-driven excellence brings structure without rigidity:**
We use customisable templates to standardise the layout and navigation of online courses, ensuring consistency for learners. At the same time, we work closely with faculty to tailor each course's content, tone, and delivery to suit their pedagogical intent.
- **Dedicated QA checkpoints keep quality front and centre:**
Our development cycles include multiple built-in quality assurance reviews across content clarity, accessibility, technical performance, and alignment with learning outcomes. This layered approach reduces the need for late-stage fixes and strengthens learner experience.
- **Faculty support and coaching bridges the gap between content and design:**
Faculty bring the deep expertise; our learning designers bring the tools and frameworks to translate that into compelling digital learning. Through coaching, collaborative editing, and ongoing guidance, we help educators deliver quality without needing to become edtech experts.

"Backend support is the foundation that allows our learning designers to focus on what matters most: creating meaningful learning experiences. By handling technical and operational complexities behind the scenes, we free designers to innovate and deliver deeper educational impact."

- *Liesel Slingers, Head of Learning, OES Learning Solutions*



Generalised success indicators

Institutions applying these practices report measurable benefits:

- Increased course completion and learner satisfaction
- Fewer revisions post-launch due to robust quality assurance processes
- Stronger faculty engagement and confidence in digital delivery
- Consistent user experiences across large portfolios of courses

These outcomes reflect not just technical achievement, but also philosophical alignment with learner needs.



Case study

"Six weeks, three sprints, one cohesive launch"

A college preparing to **scale** its online offerings worried that rapid growth would dilute course quality. Faculty wanted rigour; students asked for clearer navigation and more connection; media teams needed consistent standards across dozens of courses.

Instead of debating abstract "quality," the team operationalised the five pillars and built them into the workflow:



Engagement & presence: Each module opened with a short instructor video and a "why this matters" teaser; weekly announcements and low-stakes checks kept momentum.



Clarity by design: A common module map (overview → content → practice → assess → reflect) and plain-language rubrics reduced cognitive load and support tickets.



Inclusion first: Captions and transcripts were generated at draft stage (not at the end); alt text guidelines and colour-contrast checks lived in the media checklist.



Authenticity: Scenario prompts and case mini-briefs replaced generic essays; assessments were tied to real-world artefacts (memos, proposals, portfolios).



Social learning: Discussion prompts shifted from opinion posts to structured peer review with roles (starter, challenger, synthesiser) to deepen dialogue.

“Our quality standards are grounded in learning science and emphasise experiences that are engaging, authentic, inclusive, memorable, and social. When these principles are baked into the process, quality becomes inevitable—not accidental.”

- *Liesel Slingers, Head of Learning, OES Learning Solutions*



The results

Post-launch, the programme saw fewer late-stage revisions because clarity and accessibility were addressed early, more consistent navigation across courses thanks to the shared module map, and a visible lift in learner satisfaction comments around “easy to follow,” “useful feedback,” and “feels connected.” The lesson: learner-centric quality scales when it’s translated into checklists, templates, and habits—not just aspirations.





SCALE Learner-Centric Quality Framework

Evaluating the student experience

Use this framework to review whether your digital courses deliver on the five essentials of learner-centric design: engagement, clarity, inclusion, authenticity, and social learning. This tool supports academic and design teams in ensuring that student experience remains central—even as course volumes increase.

Plan & cadence

Project broken down into **sprints** (with named outputs per sprint).

Weekly ceremonies in the calendar: sprint planning, mid-week check-in, end-of-week review.

Risk register started (faculty availability, approvals, content gaps) with mitigation owners.

Prototypes & standards

Proof-of-concept assets approved early (1 video sample, 1 module shell, 1 assessment pattern).

Visual + audio style guide signed off (lower-thirds, transitions, levels).

Interaction palette agreed (polls, scenarios, discussions)—kept small and reusable.

Parallel workstreams

Design, media, and QA running **concurrently**, not sequentially.

Shared Kanban or sprint board visible to faculty and leads.

Content staging areas set (LMS sandbox, media folder structure).

Quality & accessibility

Layered QA pass for content, media, and interactions each sprint.

WCAG 2.0 AA checks and **mobile-readiness** embedded (not left to the end).

Captioning/transcripts automated, with human review once per sprint.

Faculty experience

Faculty attend **short, predictable reviews** (15–30 min) with clear “approve/amend” choices.

One-page roles & responsibilities circulated (who approves what, by when).

Early **wins showcased** to boost confidence (clip reel, module walkthrough).

If you can tick 80%+ of these boxes, you’re set up to move fast without breaking quality.

CHAPTER 5



Evergreen Innovation:

Designing for durability,
adaptability, and the future

Why evergreen innovation matters

The rapid pace of technological and societal change means that quality alone is no longer enough. For institutions to remain relevant and resilient, their digital learning systems must be built to evolve.

Evergreen innovation is about creating learning ecosystems that can grow with new demands, technologies, and learner expectations. It emphasises sustainable design, flexible infrastructure, and thoughtful integration of emerging tools like AI. Institutions that embrace this framework are better equipped to adapt, **scale**, and lead.

What sustainable innovation looks like

Long-term success in digital education requires institutions to go beyond one-time transformations. Evergreen strategies are those that:

- **Reduce ongoing maintenance burdens** by repurposing and templating assets.
- **Empower internal teams** to revise and adapt content without external dependencies.
- **Anticipate future change** by designing flexible, modular systems.
- **Align technology with pedagogy**, ensuring that innovation results in a better learner experience.

“A successful learning strategy must strike a balance: robust enough to meet today’s needs, yet flexible enough to adapt to tomorrow’s challenges. Institutions that embrace this balance are better prepared to evolve with shifting expectations and demands.”

Institutional practices that support longevity

Institutions implementing evergreen strategies often begin by investing in foundational systems that will sustain future course development.

Common tactics are included below.

- **Build reusable design frameworks for long-term efficiency:**
Developing course templates and modular content structures allows faculty to quickly adapt proven designs for new programmes. This not only speeds up development but also ensures learners experience a consistent quality standard across the institution's portfolio.
- **Establish visual and instructional style guides to preserve consistency:**
Clear guidelines for tone, design, and instructional elements remove unnecessary guesswork for faculty and design teams. With fewer one-off decisions to make, teams can focus their energy on enhancing the learning experience rather than reinventing core elements.
- **Empower faculty and staff to maintain content independently:**
Providing training and easy-to-use tools enables educators to update materials themselves, reducing reliance on external support. This decentralised approach ensures content stays current and responsive to learner needs without causing bottlenecks.
- **Templatise media production for quality at scale:**
By standardising elements like animation sequences, graphic treatments, and visual styles, media teams can produce high volumes of assets quickly and cost-effectively without compromising on quality or brand alignment.

"AI enables emergent learning, where outcomes adapt to each learner's input. This mirrors the complexity of real-world environments and helps students develop skills that are both practical and transferable. It's a shift from static instruction to dynamic, adaptive experiences."

- Cari Coetzee, GenAI Solutions Architect, OES Learning Solutions

Responsible AI integration: A path to future readiness

AI holds transformative potential for education, from streamlining operations to personalising learning pathways. But responsible integration is essential. AI should be treated as a tool to enhance human teaching, not replace it.

Research snapshot

- Generative AI is identified as a risk to assessment integrity, challenging traditional approaches to assuring student learning outcomes. (TEQSA)
- In response, providers are required to implement institution-wide, governance-backed plans to address AI risks across teaching, learning, and assessment. (TEQSA)
- OES's Connected Assurance Framework proposes a scalable model that integrates pedagogy, technology, and relational approaches to support assurance of learning in an AI-enabled environment. (OES)

Insight: In the age of AI, sustainable quality and integrity depend on connected, system-level assurance rather than fragmented or reactive controls.

Key roles AI can play in evergreen design include:

- **Adaptive learning experiences:** Dynamic assessments that respond to learner input, reinforcing mastery and boosting confidence.
- **Automated content support:** Tools for transcription, script refinement, and basic editing that reduce production time.
- **24/7 faculty assistance:** AI-trained support agents that provide consistent guidance aligned with instructional frameworks.
- **Faster onboarding:** Generative tools that accelerate new faculty training by generating FAQs, walkthroughs, or course prep resources.

Still, institutions must approach AI with care. Fragmented tools, concerns over data privacy, and the need for faculty oversight all demand thoughtful governance.

Long-term benefits of evergreen design

Institutions investing in flexible, sustainable learning systems report benefits that go far beyond the initial course launch:

- Lower long-term production and maintenance costs
- Greater adaptability to changing learner needs or industry demands
- Improved institutional reputation for innovation and responsiveness
- More engaged faculty and empowered support teams

These gains compound over time, reinforcing the value of early investment in reusability, adaptability, and smarter integration of tools.

From innovation to institutional framework

Evergreen innovation is fundamentally about culture. Institutions that thrive in the future will be those that view change as opportunity and technology as a catalyst for continuous improvement. Having explored sustainability and AI, the final section in this framework turns towards the big picture: how institutions can adopt **SCALE** as both a model and a framework for the long term.

The goal is not automation for its own sake, but strategic enhancement that improves outcomes and preserves institutional values.

“Today, we rely on a mix of AI tools—one for voiceover, another for asset creation, another for animation. But these tools don’t replace people. Human oversight is essential to integrate the outputs, maintain quality, and ensure everything fits together seamlessly.”



Case study **Scaling** for the long term with reusable frameworks

When one U.S.-based institution approached OES, they had a clear challenge: their in-house team could design a handful of courses, but they lacked the capacity to update and expand them consistently. Faculty were frustrated by outdated assets, and leadership worried about the long-term costs of constant redevelopment.

OES team introduced **modular design templates** and **reusable media frameworks**. By establishing a set of visual and instructional style guides upfront, courses gained a consistent “look and feel,” while still leaving space for faculty personalisation.

At first, faculty resisted templating, fearing it would dilute their teaching voice. To demonstrate the opposite, the team piloted a small proof-of-concept module using templated design.

The results

The outcome was surprising even to skeptics: faculty found they spent less time formatting and more time focusing on pedagogy. Learners reported higher satisfaction scores due to consistent navigation, and the institution could revise content faster when accreditation updates arrived.

“Templatizing animations and visual styles allows us to produce large volumes of high-quality videos without reinventing the wheel. This approach streamlines production, accelerates timelines, and ensures consistency across every asset.”

- Gert Steyn, Senior Video Producer, OES Learning Solutions

This case highlights what evergreen innovation looks like in practice: **an upfront investment in reusable frameworks that pay dividends in efficiency, adaptability, and learner experience over time.**



SCALE Evergreen Innovation Checklist

Testing the durability and future-readiness of digital learning systems

This checklist helps institutions evaluate whether their digital initiatives are built to last. Leaders can use it to assess flexibility, sustainability, faculty empowerment, responsible AI integration, and alignment with mission—ensuring that today’s innovations continue to deliver value tomorrow.

Is this solution flexible? Can courses be adapted as learner needs, markets, or technologies evolve?

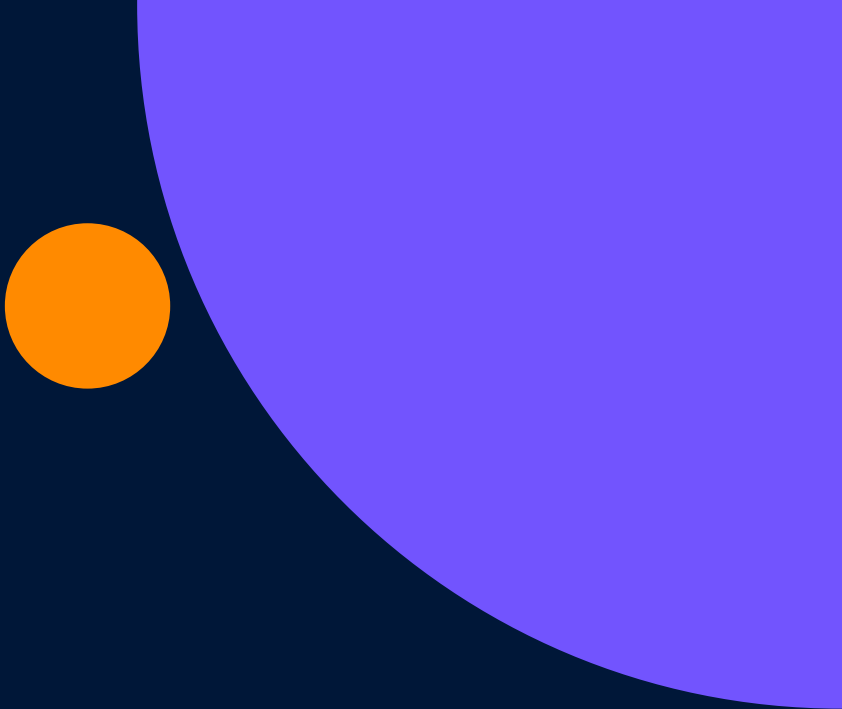
Is it sustainable? Will our team be able to maintain and update this content without constant outside intervention?

Does it reduce duplication? Are we leveraging templates, frameworks, or shared assets to avoid reinventing from scratch?

Are faculty empowered? Do educators have the tools and training to update and personalise content themselves?

Is AI integration responsible? Are tools being piloted with governance, privacy safeguards, and human oversight in place?

Does this align with mission? Beyond efficiency, does this innovation enhance learner outcomes and institutional identity?



Conclusion

Scaling with purpose

Scaling with purpose

A leadership decision, not a pedagogy project

Digital transformation in higher education is no longer primarily a question of tools. It is a question of leadership.

Sector studies all point to the same conclusion: institutions that treat digital capability as a strategic, quality assured and equity-driven function are better positioned to weather demographic, financial and technological shocks.

The institutions that thrive will be those that treat transformation not as a one-time project, but as an ongoing practice grounded in alignment, inclusion, and evidence.

SCALE is more than a framework—it's a mindset for sustainable digital transformation. Across its five pillars—Strategy, Collaboration, Agility, Quality, and Innovation—it offers institutions a repeatable way to evolve, adapt, and lead in an era of constant change.

SCALE is an operating model that helps institutions move from intention to execution. It provides:



Strategy that connects online learning to growth, margin and mission



Collaborative design that earns faculty trust and protects academic integrity



Agile execution that delivers speed with control



Learner-centric quality that supports retention and equity



Evergreen innovation that keeps systems adaptable and affordable

The practical questions for leaders are:

- Do we have the capacity and expertise to build this operating model ourselves within the timeframes our context demands?
- If not, what kind of partner do we need, and how will we hold them accountable for the outcomes that matter to us?

By putting learners at the centre, empowering faculty as partners, and designing for adaptability from the start, higher education can move beyond the cycle of reaction and rebuild around purpose and resilience.

Exploring Partnerships

Questions to ask any potential partner

- How will you work with our governance and accreditation requirements?
- How do you respect academic freedom while ensuring consistent quality?
- What concrete outcomes have you delivered for institutions like ours?
- How will you build our internal capability rather than lock us in?

What it is like to work with OES

Across all models, OES operates with:

- Governance alignment to existing academic structures and policies
- Sprint-based project plans that respect academic calendars and committees
- Transparent reporting on progress, risks and decisions
- A deliberate focus on leaving internal teams stronger and more self-sufficient

How OES works with institutions

OES offers a way to move faster, with less risk, and with a clear plan to leave your institution stronger, not more dependent.

SCALE describes what needs to happen. OES is one way to get it done.

OES supports institutions through three main engagement models.

1. End-to-end transformation partner

For institutions seeking a unified partner across strategy, programme development, design, media, QA, technology integration and capability building.

2. Co-design and capacity building

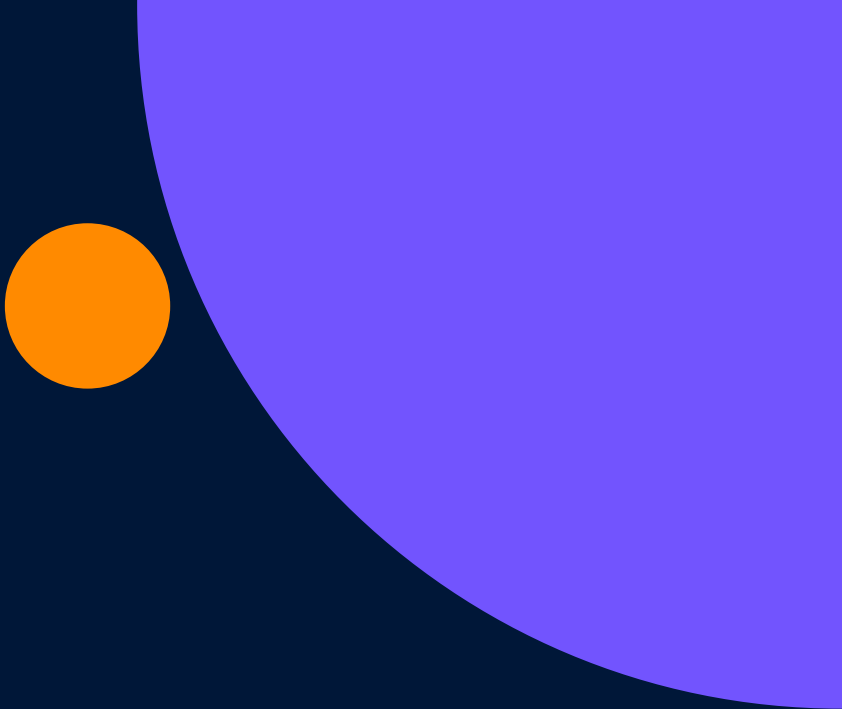
For institutions that already have internal teams but need structure, scale and uplift.

3. Modular services

For institutions needing targeted support. Institutions can use modular services as building blocks towards a more integrated SCALE operating model.

“The OES educational development team was professional, timely, and invested in creating a course that brought the educational content to life. The team was knowledgeable in the content area and was able to provide constructive feedback that enhanced the final product.”

- Ria Gurganus, VitAL, The University of Alabama



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