

Subtheme 4: Widening Access and growing participation while safeguarding quality

Assuring Quality in the Age of Modality Multiplicity

A Governance Framework for Safeguarding Standards Across Contact, Distance, Hybrid and Micro-credentialing Pathways

INQAAHE Forum 2026

Based on the paper by Dr. Linda Meyer (Rosebank College) and Nadia Landman (The Independent Institute of Education), South Africa







Session at a glance

Framing the challenge **01**

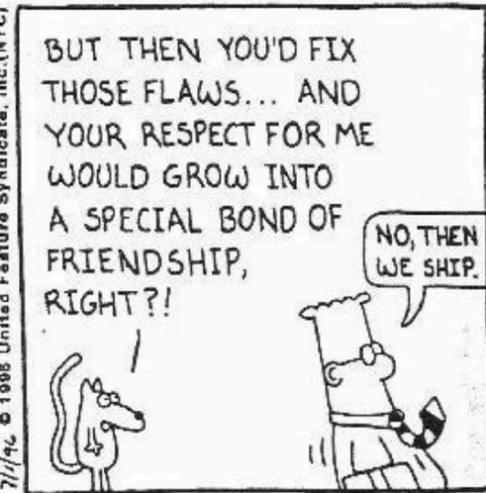
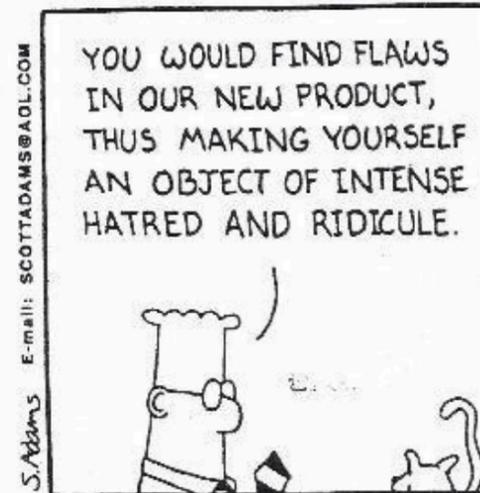
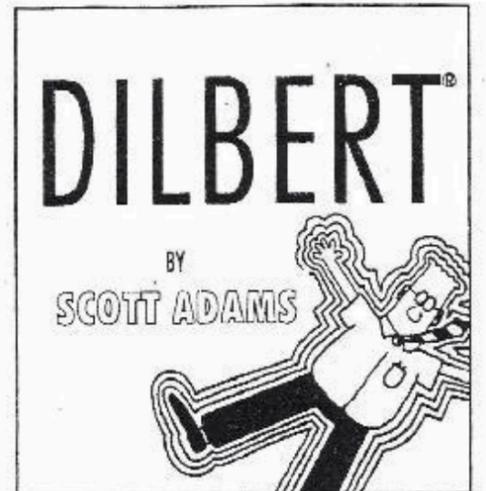
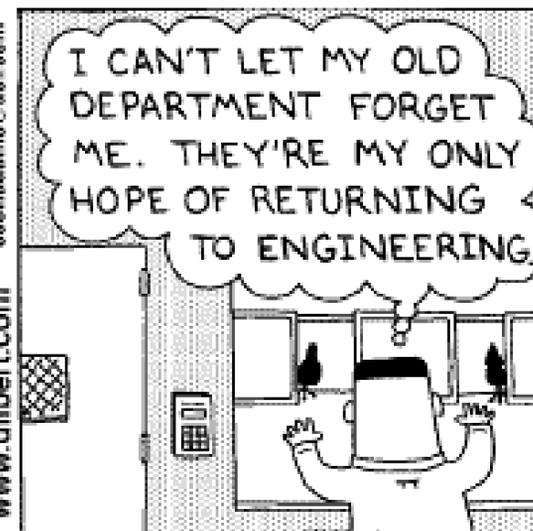
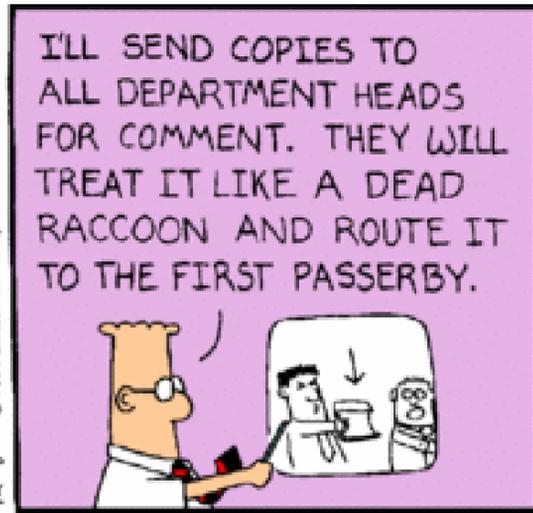
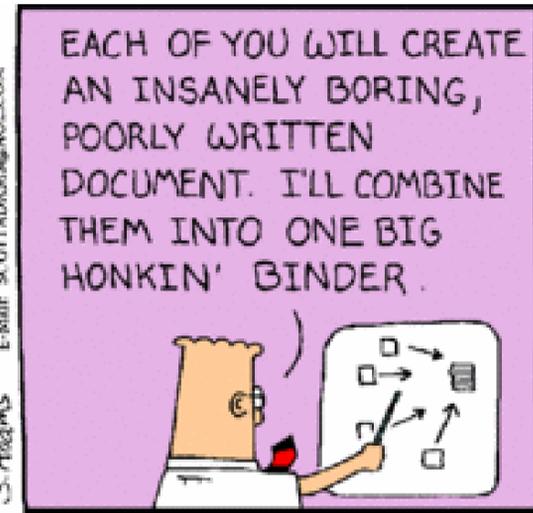
Understanding Modality Multiplicity **02**

AQMS as an Adaptive Framework **03**

Interactive Co-Creation **04**

Global & Future Perspectives **05**

Key Takeaways & Close **06**



Subtheme 4: Widening Access and growing participation while safeguarding quality

Framing the challenge

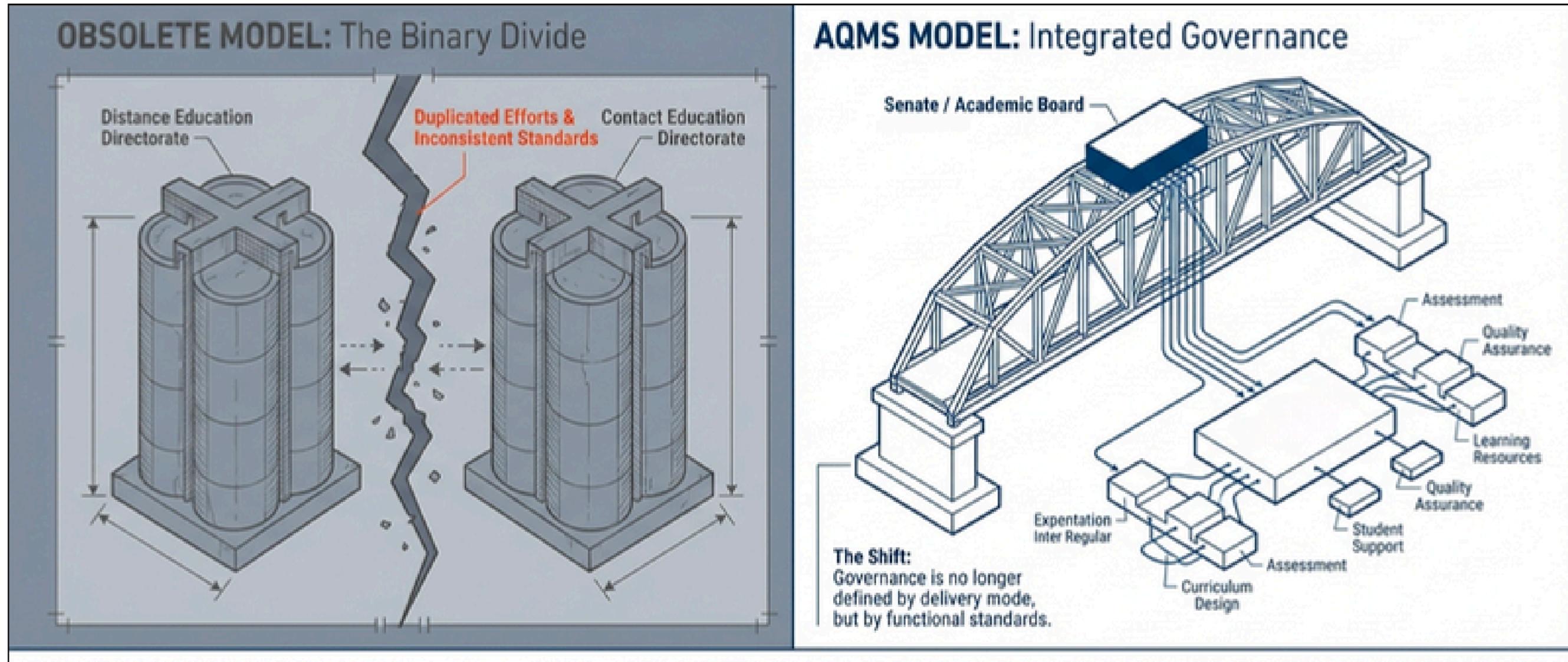
A Governance Framework for Safeguarding Standards Across Contact, Distance, Hybrid and Micro-credentialing Pathways

INQAAHE Forum 2026

Based on the paper by Dr. Linda Meyer (Rosebank College) and Nadia Landman (The Independent Institute of Education), South Africa



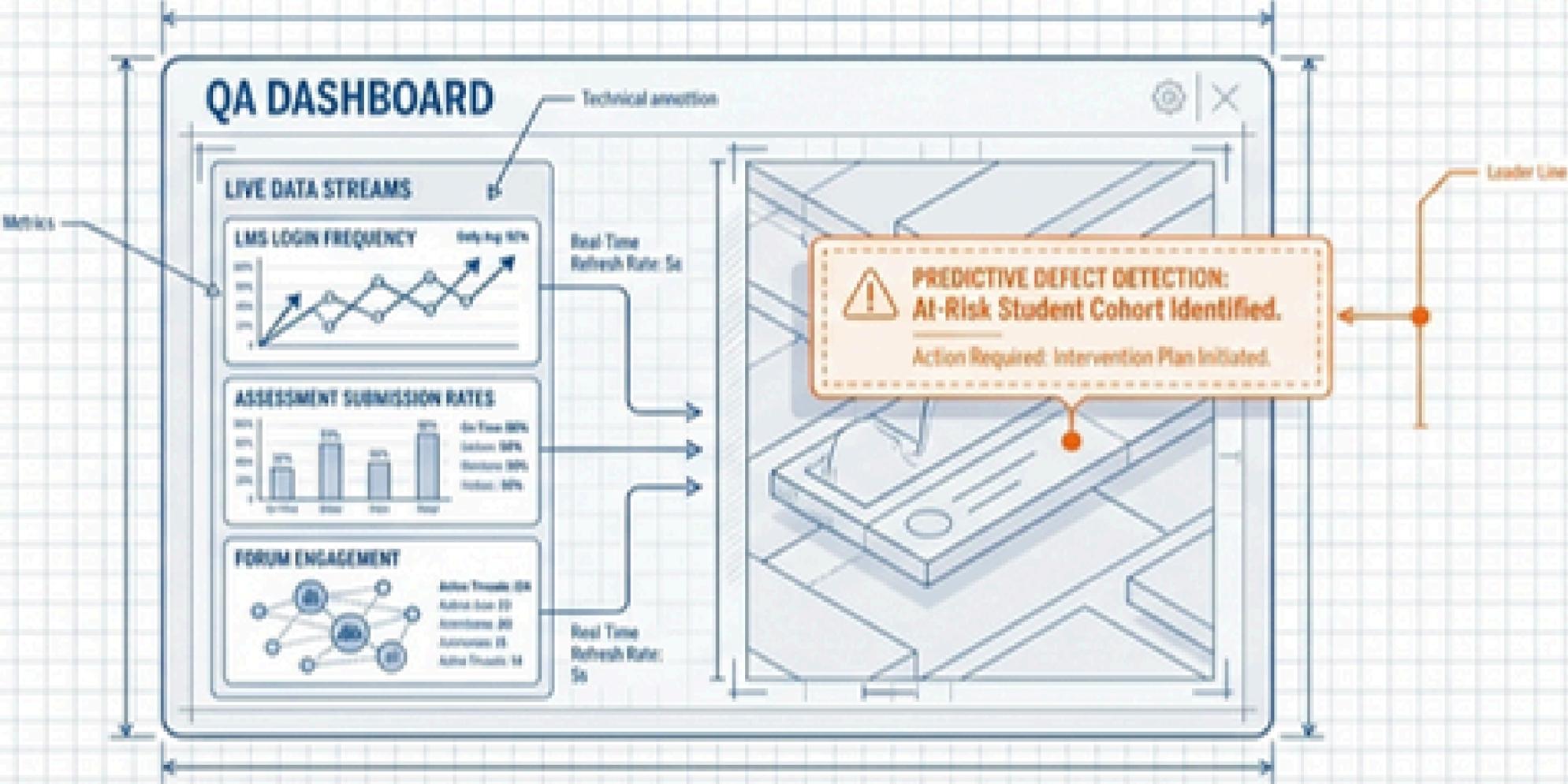
Dismantling the Silos: The Single-System Principle



Strategic Outcome: Parity of Esteem

The AQMS ensures that distance or online options are never viewed as second-tier pathways.

Quality 4.0: The Real-Time Monitoring Engine.



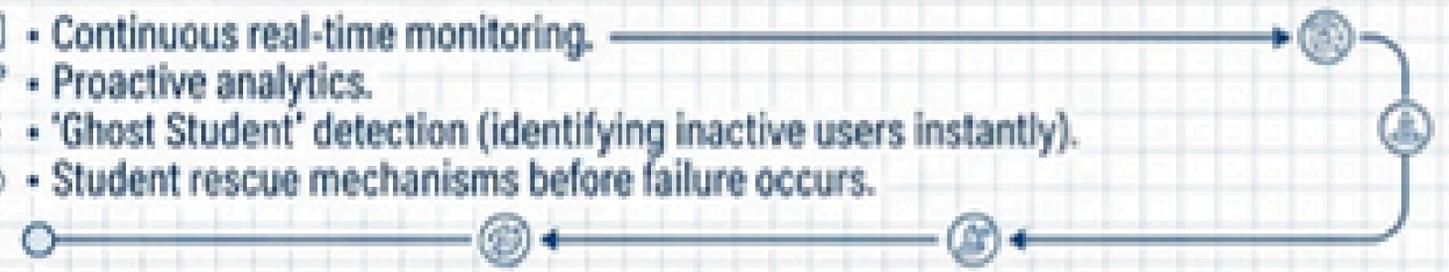
TRADITIONAL APPROACH: The Autopsy.

- Periodic 5-year reviews.
- Reactive reporting.
- Analyzing failure after it happens.

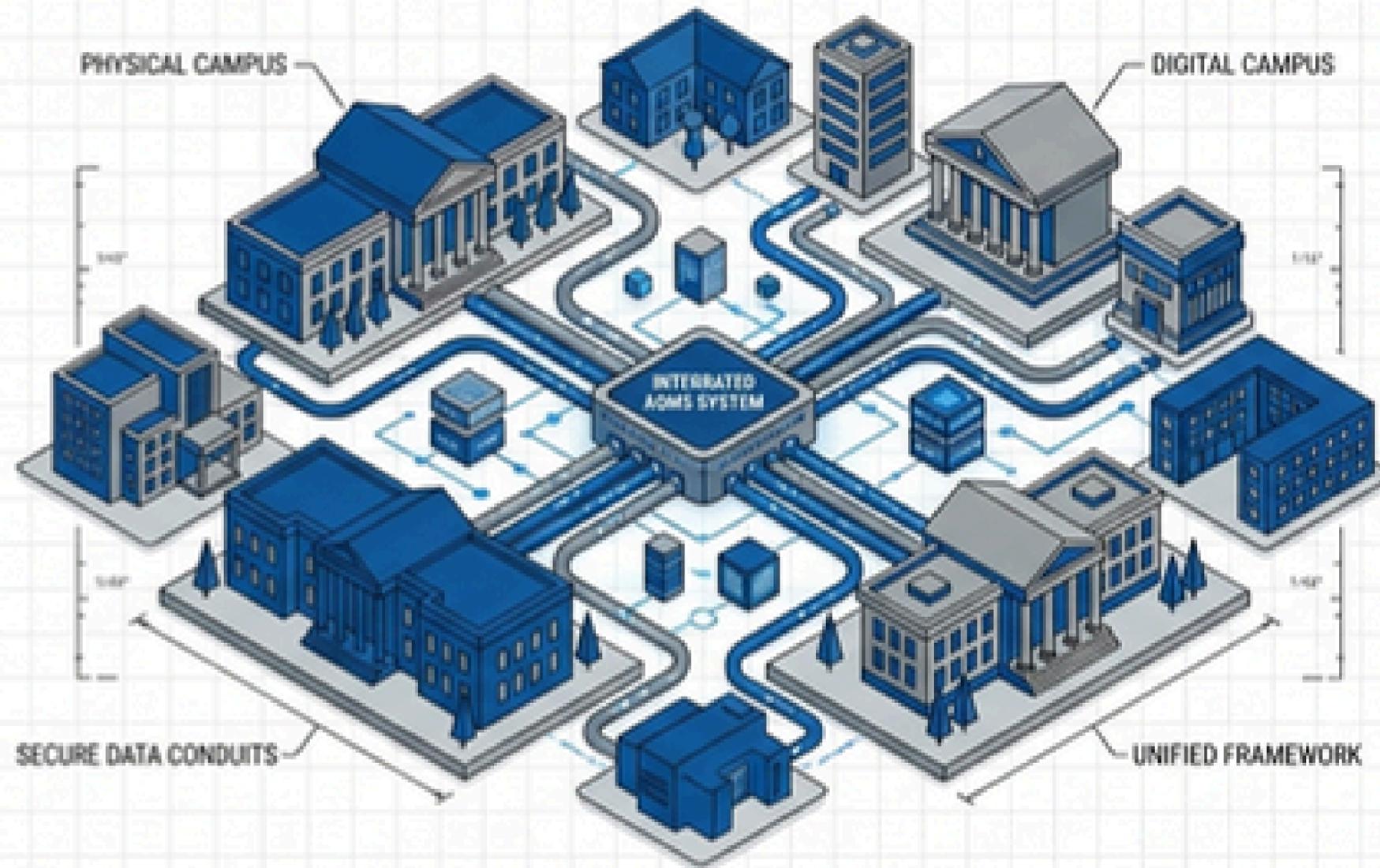


AQMS APPROACH: The Biopsy.

- Continuous real-time monitoring.
- Proactive analytics.
- 'Ghost Student' detection (identifying inactive users instantly).
- Student rescue mechanisms before failure occurs.



MODALITY MULTIPLICITY, QUALITY UNITY.



- ☑ **GOVERNANCE:**
Unified oversight, differentiated by qualification type.
- ☑ **WORKFLOW:**
Intentional, reflexive design.
- ☑ **EVIDENCE:**
Universal standards, modality-specific artifacts.
- ☑ **EXPANSION:**
A rigorous, stackable framework for micro-credentials.

The **AQMS Framework** ensures that as we expand **WHERE** and **HOW** we teach, we never compromise on **WHAT** that education is worth.

The Strategic Imperative

Global higher education is defined by “modality multiplicity”, the simultaneous delivery of face-to-face, blended, distance, hybrid and micro-credential formats.



The challenge

Traditional quality assurance (QA) systems are designed for uniform, single mode delivery. Applying these rigidly to new delivery models creates fragmented oversight, uneven standards, and a risk to institutional reputation.

The solution

An Adaptive Academic Quality Management System (AQMS). This framework ensures ‘parity of esteem’ across all modalities by flexing operational processes while maintaining rigid core standards.

The outcome

A governance model that simultaneously widens access (equity) and safeguards institutional credibility (quality), proving that flexible delivery does not require lowered standards.

Subtheme 4: Widening Access and growing participation while safeguarding quality

Understanding Modality Multiplicity

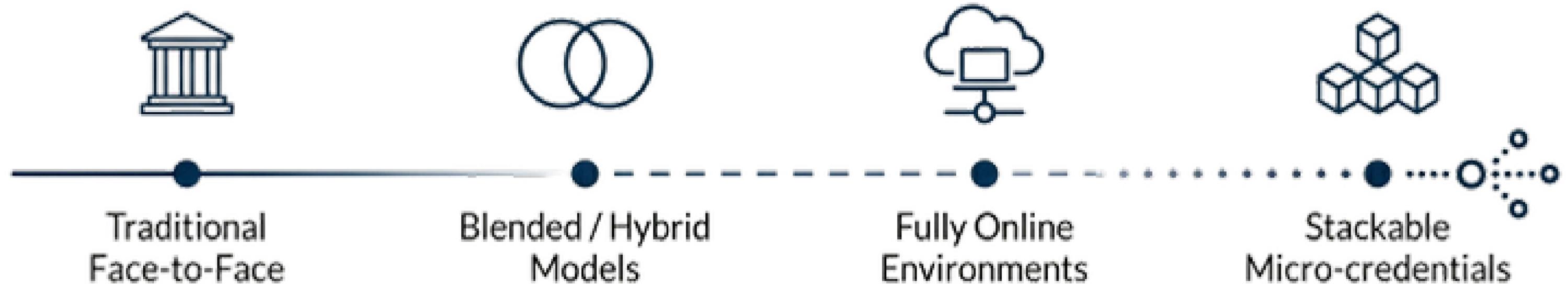
A Governance Framework for Safeguarding Standards Across Contact, Distance, Hybrid and Micro-credentialing Pathways

INQAAHE Forum 2026

Based on the paper by Dr. Linda Meyer (Rosebank College) and Nadia Landman (The Independent Institute of Education), South Africa



The era of modality multiplicity



Key Insight: Expansion into these diverse formats supports access and participation, but it challenges the integrity of QA systems designed for a monoculture delivery era. The goal is not to limit these modalities but to govern them effectively.

Strategic Tension: Access vs Integrity

Side A: Widening Access

- Driven by new learner demographics
- Necessity of flexible pathways
- Imperative for growing participation



Side B: Enhancing Integrity

- Driven by regulatory compliance
- Maintenance of institutional reputation
- Requirement for student protection

Core Question: How do we expand participation through new models without compromising the credibility of the qualification?

Without adaptive governance, institutions face critical risk:
the dilution of standards in the pursuit of growth.

The Core Challenge: Ensuring Parity of Esteem

Definition

Parity of esteem ensures that a qualification bears the same value and credibility regardless of the mode of delivery.

The Risk of Inaction



Fragmented oversight: Different teams manage quality for different modes leads to inconsistency.



Uneven standards: The creation of a 'Two-tier' education system where alternative pathways are viewed as second-class options.



Diminished trust: Stakeholder scepticism regarding the comparability of outcomes and the value of the credential.

Goal: A Unified standard of excellence that transcends the delivery method.

Let's start with some basics

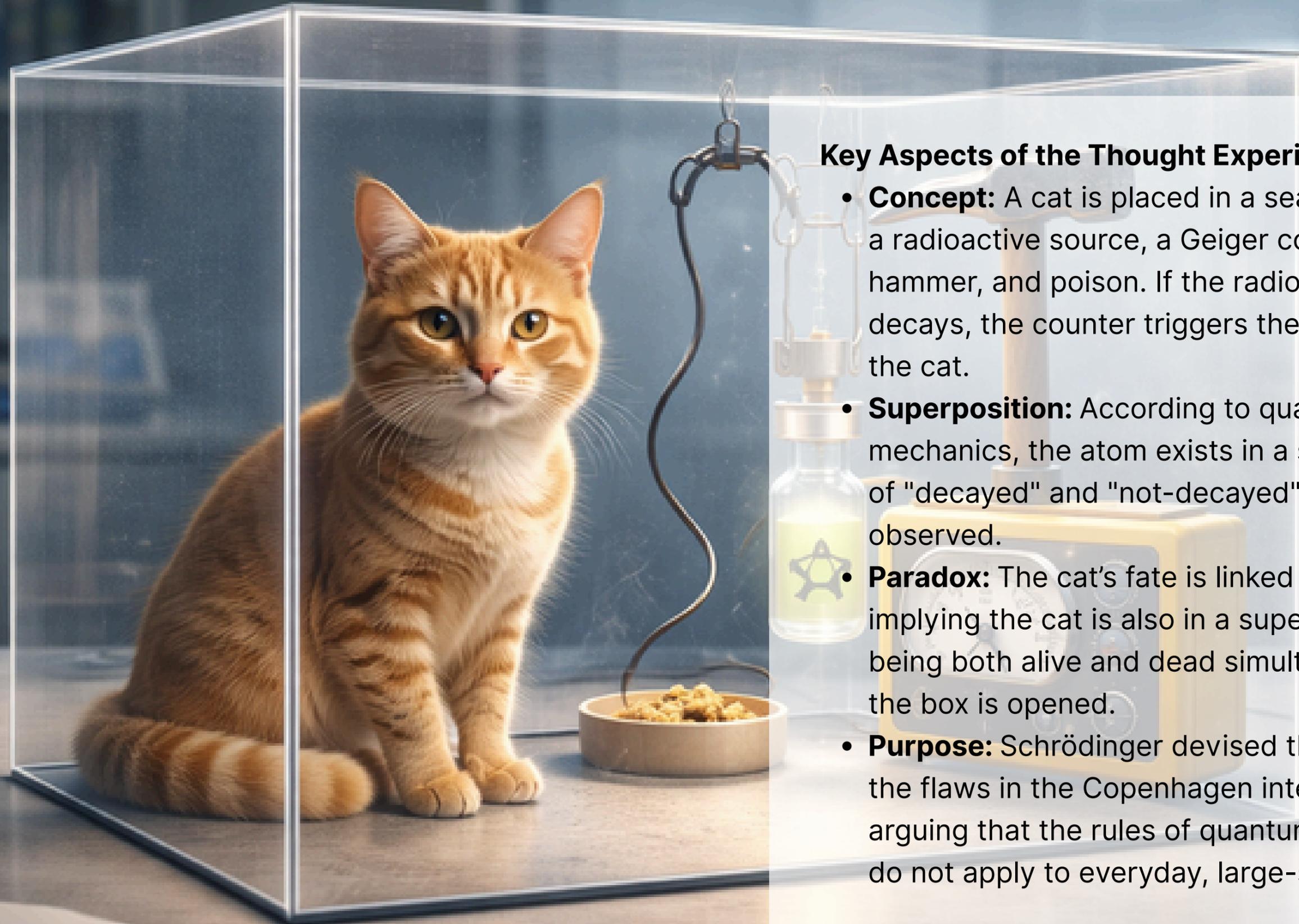
The Observer Effect (Werner Heisenberg, 1927)

- The observer effect is the phenomenon where the act of observing or measuring a situation or system inherently alters its state or behaviour.
- It signifies that the measurement process,, whether in quantum physics or human studies, causes a change, often termed "contamination" or a "probe effect", meaning the final data reflects the interaction, not just the original state.

Werner Heisenberg is credited with founding the "observer effect" in quantum mechanics, famously introduced in 1927 alongside his uncertainty principle. He proposed that the act of measuring or observing a quantum system unavoidably disturbs it, making it impossible to simultaneously know precise values for certain pairs of physical properties, such as position and momentum.

Introducing Schrödinger's Standard

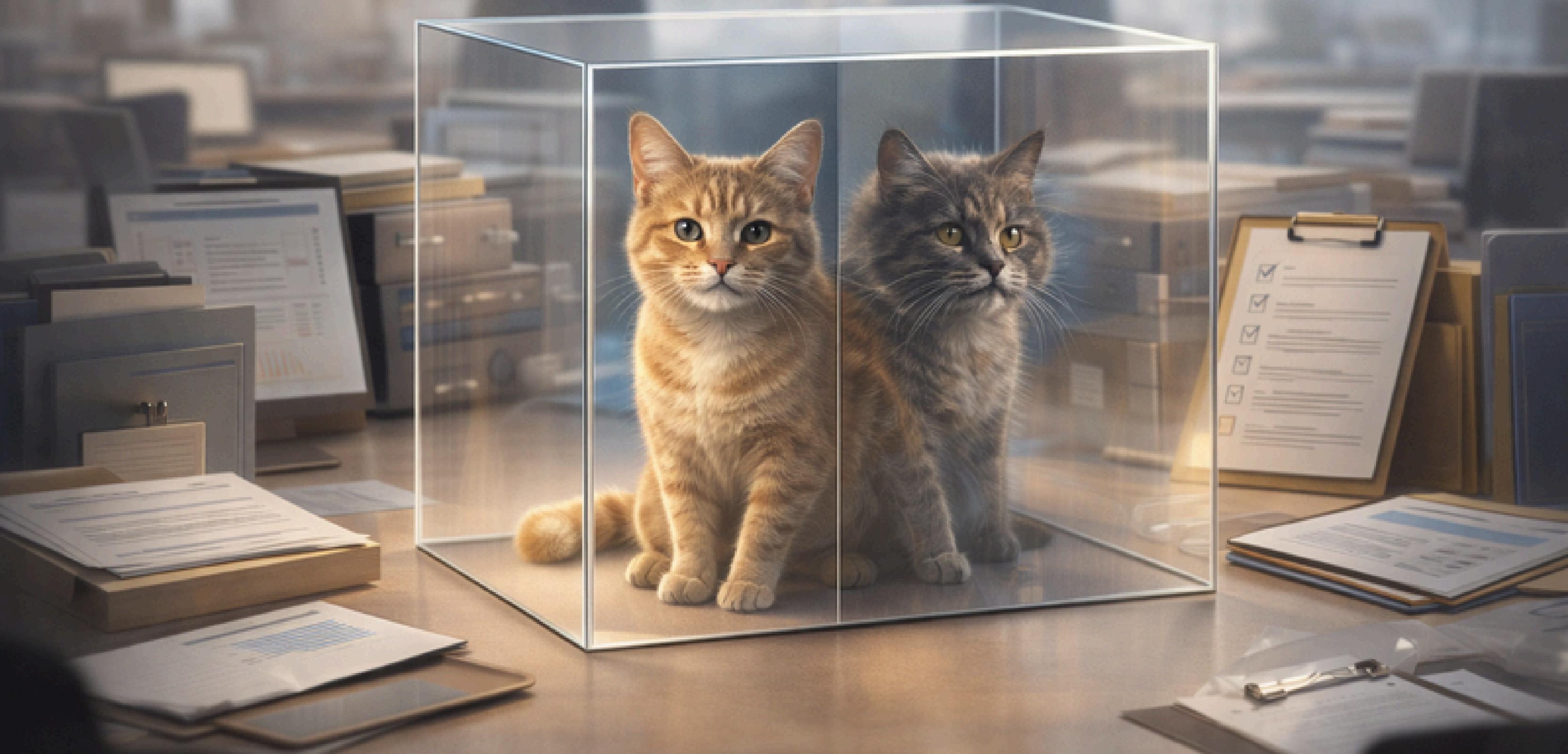




Key Aspects of the Thought Experiment:

- **Concept:** A cat is placed in a sealed box with a radioactive source, a Geiger counter, a hammer, and poison. If the radioactive atom decays, the counter triggers the poison, killing the cat.
- **Superposition:** According to quantum mechanics, the atom exists in a superposition of "decayed" and "not-decayed" states until observed.
- **Paradox:** The cat's fate is linked to the atom, implying the cat is also in a superposition of being both alive and dead simultaneously until the box is opened.
- **Purpose:** Schrödinger devised this to highlight the flaws in the Copenhagen interpretation, arguing that the rules of quantum mechanics do not apply to everyday, large-scale objects.

Introducing Schrödinger's Standard



Key considerations...

Good academic quality assurance doesn't open the box to check on the cat — it designs the system so we're never surprised by what we find.

1. Standards are essential for collapsing uncertainty into evidence.
2. The risk isn't the mode; it's unmanaged ambiguity across modes.
3. Quality must be designed across the journey, not inferred from structure.

Subtheme 4: Widening Access and growing participation while safeguarding quality

AQMS as an Adaptive Framework

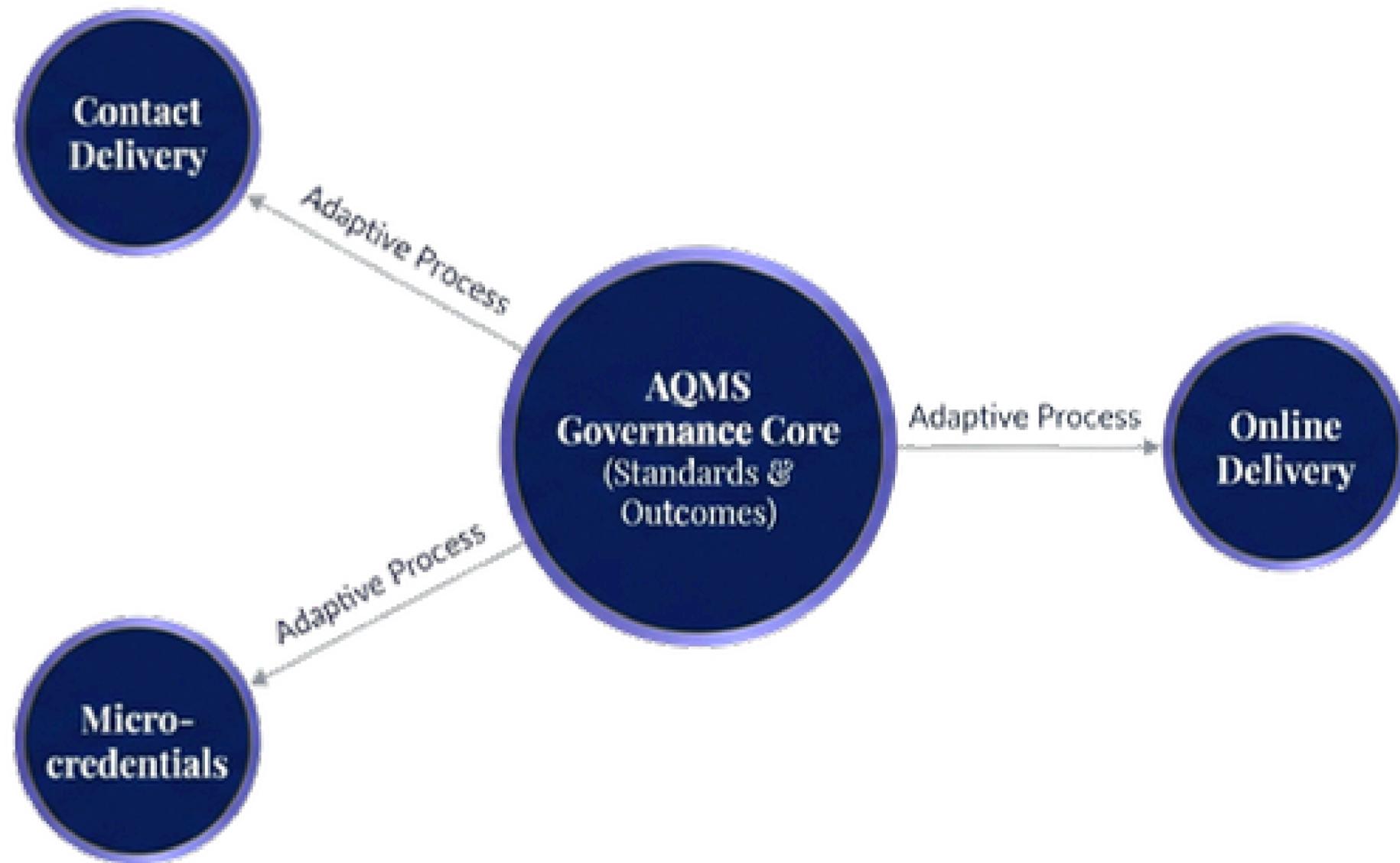
A Governance Framework for Safeguarding Standards Across Contact, Distance, Hybrid and Micro-credentialing Pathways

INQAAHE Forum 2026

Based on the paper by Dr. Linda Meyer (Rosebank College) and Nadia Landman (The Independent Institute of Education), South Africa



The Solution: The Adaptive AQMS Framework



Definition: The Academic Quality Management System (AQMS) is a structured, evidence-based governance model designed to adapt QA processes dynamically to different learning pathways.

Key Capability: The system enables QA processes to flex across modalities without compromising the core standards held in the central hub.

Strategic Pillars of an Adaptive AQMS

01

Flexible workflows

Moving away from rigid checklists to processes that adapt to the speed and nature of the delivery mode.

Example: *Implementing continuous assessment in micro-credentials versus traditional semester reviews in degrees.*

02

Modality Specific Evidence

Defining evidence requirements that are 'fit for purpose' for the specific medium, rather than forcing face-to-face metrics onto online environments.

Example: *Replacing attendance logs with engagement analytics.*

03

Technology-enabled monitoring

Utilising digital tools and AI for real-time oversight across decentralised platforms.

Example: *Automated dashboards that flag quality risks instantly.*

Strategic Pillars of an Adaptive AQMS

Concept: Same standard, different evidence

Standard: Student Engagement and Participation



Contact Delivery Evidence

- Physical attendance registers
- In-class peer review logs
- Face-to-face group work observation



Online Delivery Evidence

- LMS analytics (time-on-task)
- Discussion board frequency
- Digital interaction heatmaps



Micro-credential Evidence

- Competency completion rates
- Digital badge verification
- Automated assessment checkpoints

Takeaway: Different artefacts are collected to **verify** the **identical quality assurance standard**.

Technology as the enabler for governance

Concept: Moving from retrospective 'gatekeeping' to real-time 'quality enhancement'



Concept: Managing multi-modal quality management is impossible at scale. Technology must move from a recording tool to an enabling tool.

- **AI & Adaptive Workflows:** Automated flagging of 'at-risk' modules based on engagement data patterns.
- **Digital dashboards:** providing a unified view of quality across all modalities in real-time.
- **Scalability:** Technology allows QA to grow with participation numbers without requiring linear staff increases.

Insight: Moving from retrospective 'gatekeeping' to real-time 'quality enhancement'.

Subtheme 4: Widening Access and growing participation while safeguarding quality

Activity 1: Same Standard, Different Evidence

Institutions: Designing parity of esteem across modalities

Regulators: Regulatory parity of esteem across modalities

INQAAHE Forum 2026

Based on the paper by Dr. Linda Meyer (Rosebank College) and Nadia Landman (The Independent Institute of Education), South Africa



Let's get started....

Scenario

You are assuring the same qualification outcome delivered through:

- Contact
- Distance
- Micro-credentials

The qualification must remain defensible to external quality assurance bodies, regardless of modality.

Universal Principles

Institutional Context

- Achievement of exit-level learning outcomes
- Cognitive demand and academic level
- Assessment integrity and validity
- Meaningful student engagement
- Epistemological access to disciplinary knowledge

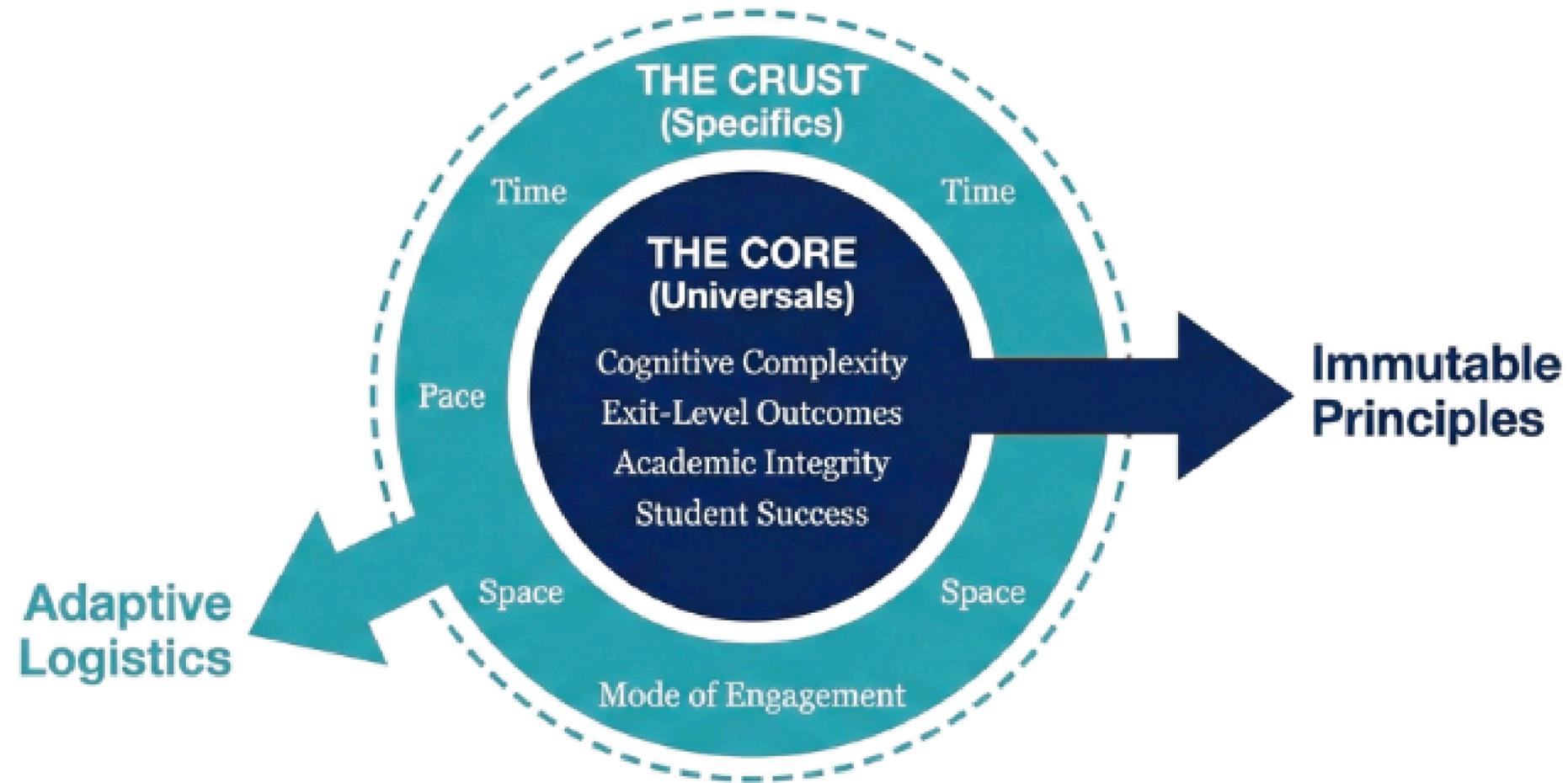
(Examples provided to anchor thinking — not an exhaustive list)

Regulatory Context

- (Non-negotiable across all modes of delivery)
- Achievement of approved exit-level outcomes
- Alignment to the registered qualification level and credit value
- Assessment validity, reliability, and integrity
- Demonstrated learner engagement sufficient to support achievement of outcomes
- Academic coherence of curriculum and learning activities
- (Illustrative examples — standards are fixed; evidence may differ)

The bifurcated approach: Rigid on Principles, Flexible on Logistics

The Core and Crust Model



The emphasis is less on ensuring that required standards are met at a particular threshold than on the deliberate, continuous, systematic and measurable improvement.

Choose one modality only and answer:

Institutional Context

What evidence would you accept to demonstrate student engagement

- for that modality, while upholding the same standard?

Regulator Context

What evidence would satisfy an external reviewer that learner engagement is adequate to support the achievement of outcomes

- in this modality?

Remember

- The standard stays fixed
- The evidence must be fit-for-purpose
- Avoid importing measures from another modality

Which means...

Institutional Context

If we can agree on these universal standards,

- The rest becomes a design question — not a compliance fight.

Remember

- The standard stays fixed
- The evidence must be fit-for-purpose
- Avoid importing measures from another modality

Regulator Context

Regulatory assurance is not about sameness of process,

- but sameness of standard and strength of evidence.

Recruitment, Admission and Selection

The standard does not change.

The evidence does.



1. Transparency and Accuracy of Information

Prospective students receive clear, accurate, and current information about programmes, requirements, costs, modes of delivery, and outcomes.

- Prospectus and printed programme guides
- Campus open-day presentations and slide decks
- Recorded briefings used by admissions staff
- Version-controlled programme information

- Programme webpages and downloadable guides
- Recorded webinars or virtual open days
- Archived updates to online prospectuses
- LMS or portal content visible pre-registration

- Short-course landing pages
- Clear statements of credit value, stackability, and recognition
- Marketing copy aligned to formal approval documents
- Screenshots of course descriptions at point of enrolment

2. Fair and Consistent Entry Requirements

Admission and selection criteria are applied consistently and fairly, regardless of mode.

- Published minimum entry requirements
- Admissions decision logs
- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) assessments
- Faculty or admissions committee minutes

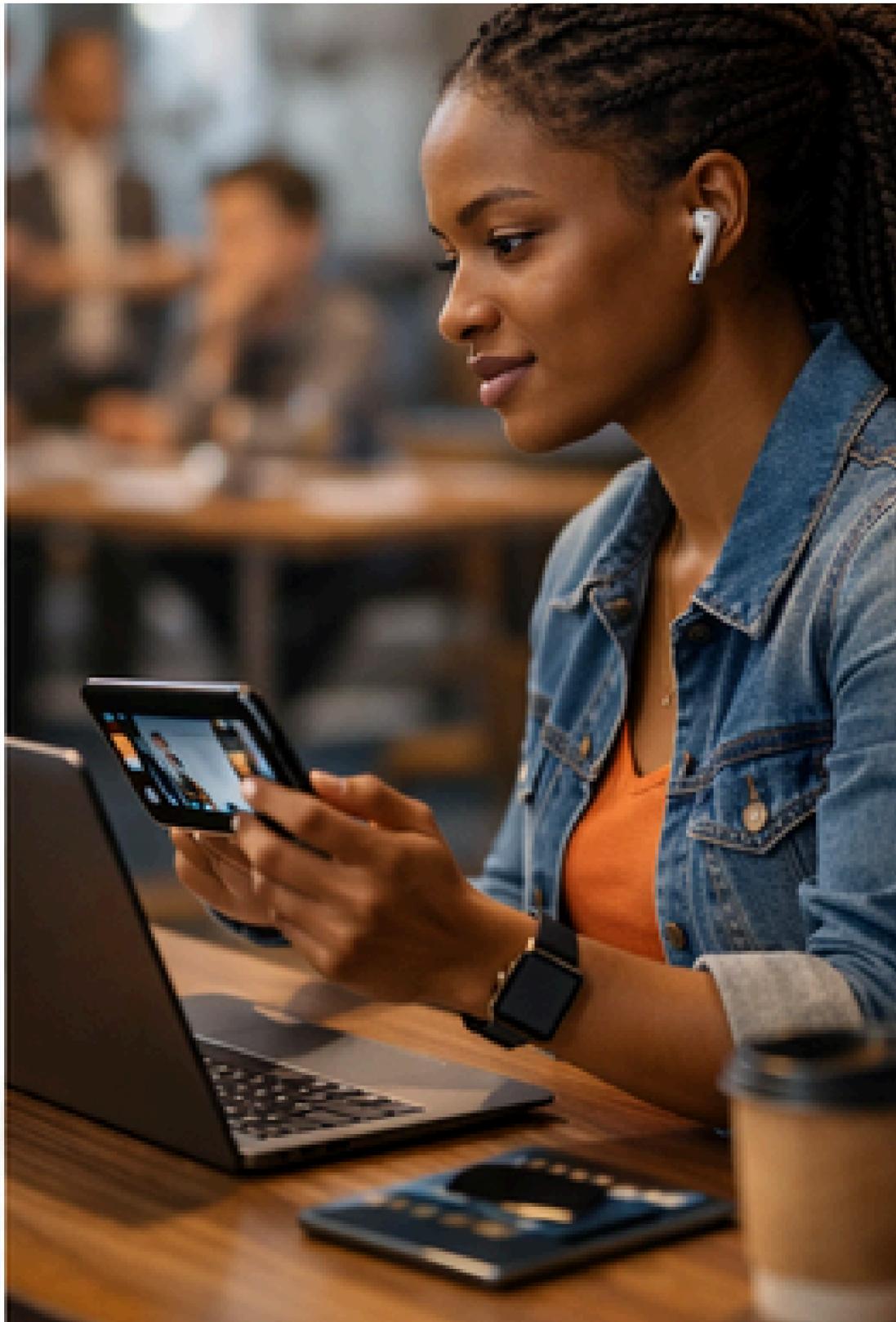
- Online application rules and validation logic
- Automated eligibility checks
- Digital RPL submissions and decisions
- Audit trail of admissions outcomes

- Defined eligibility rules (open vs selective)
- Automated access controls
- Pre-assessment or diagnostic tools
- Approval workflows for credit-bearing offerings

Teaching and Learning

How learning is delivered may change.

What constitutes quality learning does not.



Assessment Practices

Assessment determines what counts as learning.
Moderation determines whether we can trust it.



1. Validity and Alignment of Assessment

Assessment methods validly measure the stated learning outcomes and are aligned to the approved curriculum.

- Approved assessment briefs and instruments
- Mapping of assessments to learning outcomes
- Examination papers and marking memoranda
- Curriculum and assessment review reports

- Online assessment designs and configurations
- Outcome–assessment alignment documentation
- Assessment equivalence mappings
- Peer review or instructional design sign-off

- Competency or skills frameworks
- Clearly scoped assessment tasks
- Evidence of outcome–assessment fit
- Approval records for assessment design

2. Fairness, Consistency, and Reliability of Judgement

Assessment decisions are applied consistently and fairly, regardless of assessor, cohort, or mode.

- Marking guides and rubrics
- Double-marking or sampling records
- Examiner reports
- Internal moderation records

- Standardised rubrics embedded in LMS
- Assessor calibration records
- Comparative marking reports
- Moderation sampling across cohorts

- Pre-defined scoring or competency thresholds
- Automated or expert review logs
- Inter-rater reliability checks (where applicable)
- Assessment consistency reports

Subtheme 4: Widening Access and growing participation while safeguarding quality

AQMS as an Adaptive Framework

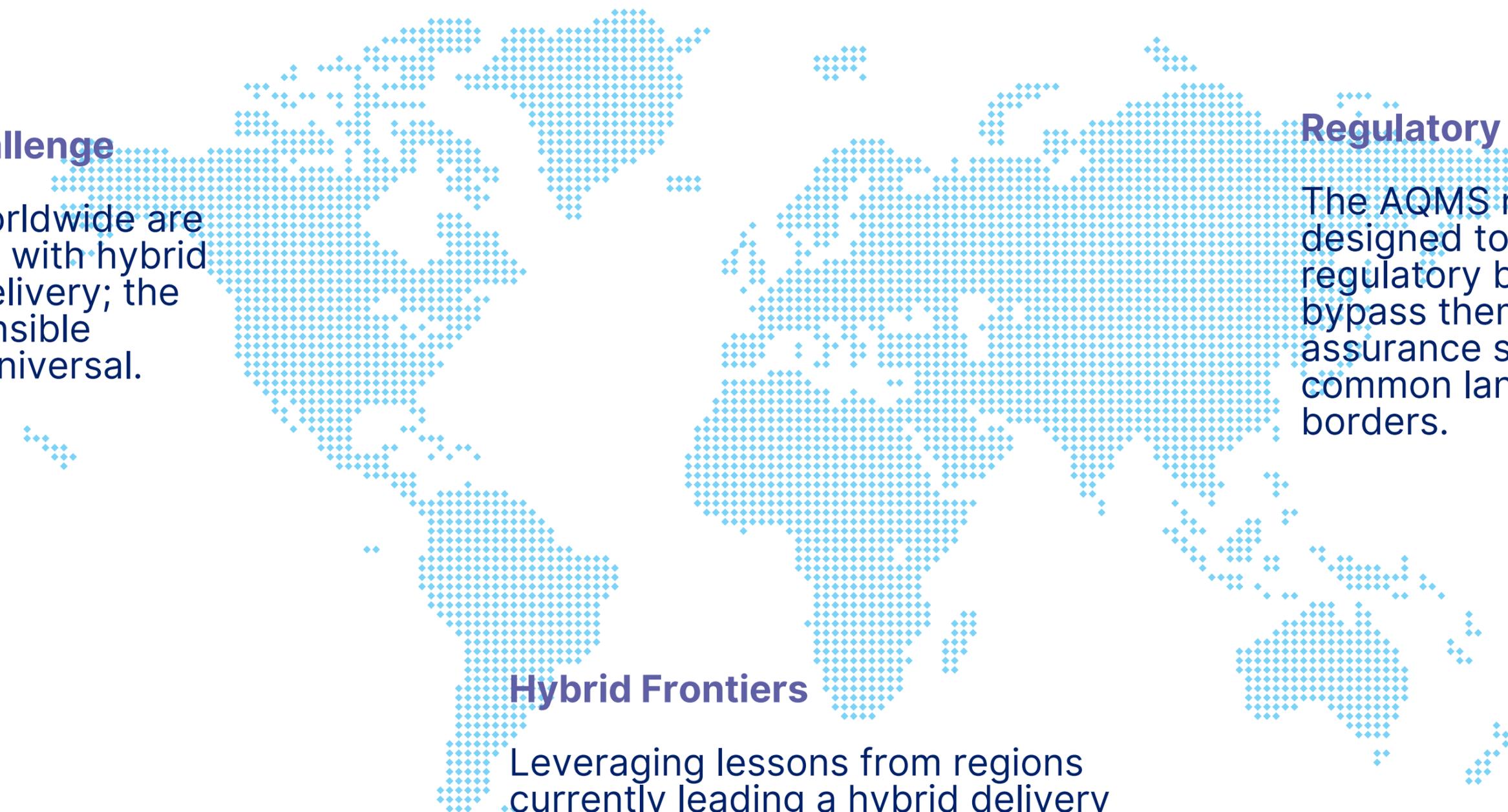
A Governance Framework for Safeguarding Standards Across Contact, Distance, Hybrid and Micro-credentialing Pathways

INQAAHE Forum 2026

Based on the paper by Dr. Linda Meyer (Rosebank College) and Nadia Landman (The Independent Institute of Education), South Africa



Global Perspectives & Transferability



Universal Challenge

Institutions worldwide are experimenting with hybrid and flexible delivery; the need for defensible standards is universal.

Regulatory Alignment

The AQMS model is designed to sit within local regulatory bodies, not bypass them. Quality assurance serves as a common language across borders.

Hybrid Frontiers

Leveraging lessons from regions currently leading a hybrid delivery integration to inform global best practices.

Equity is the ultimate quality metric



Widening access is meaningless if the education provided is sub-standard. QA is effectively a tool for social justice.

- **Protection of vulnerable learners:** QA protects students' investment, as they often rely on flexible/online pathways.
- **Avoiding 'Second-Class' Options:** Ensuring that alternative pathways (like micro-credentials) are not treated as lesser educational products.
- **Inclusive Design:** QA must account for the learner across all modes, not just institutional convenience.

Framework for Action: Designing Your Model

Diagnostic prompts to assess readiness for adaptive QA



The Universal

What standards (outcomes) must remain non-negotiable across all modes in your institution?



The Specific

Which evidence requirements must change to accurately reflect online and hybrid engagement?



The Stackable

How does your QA system account for stackable micro-credentials within degree frameworks?

Goal: Move from a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to a 'fit for purpose' architecture

Framework for Action: Designing Your Model

01 Uniformity of Outcomes Diversity of Purpose

The destination remains the same; the path (how we check it) varies.

02 Evidence Must Be Fit-for-Purpose

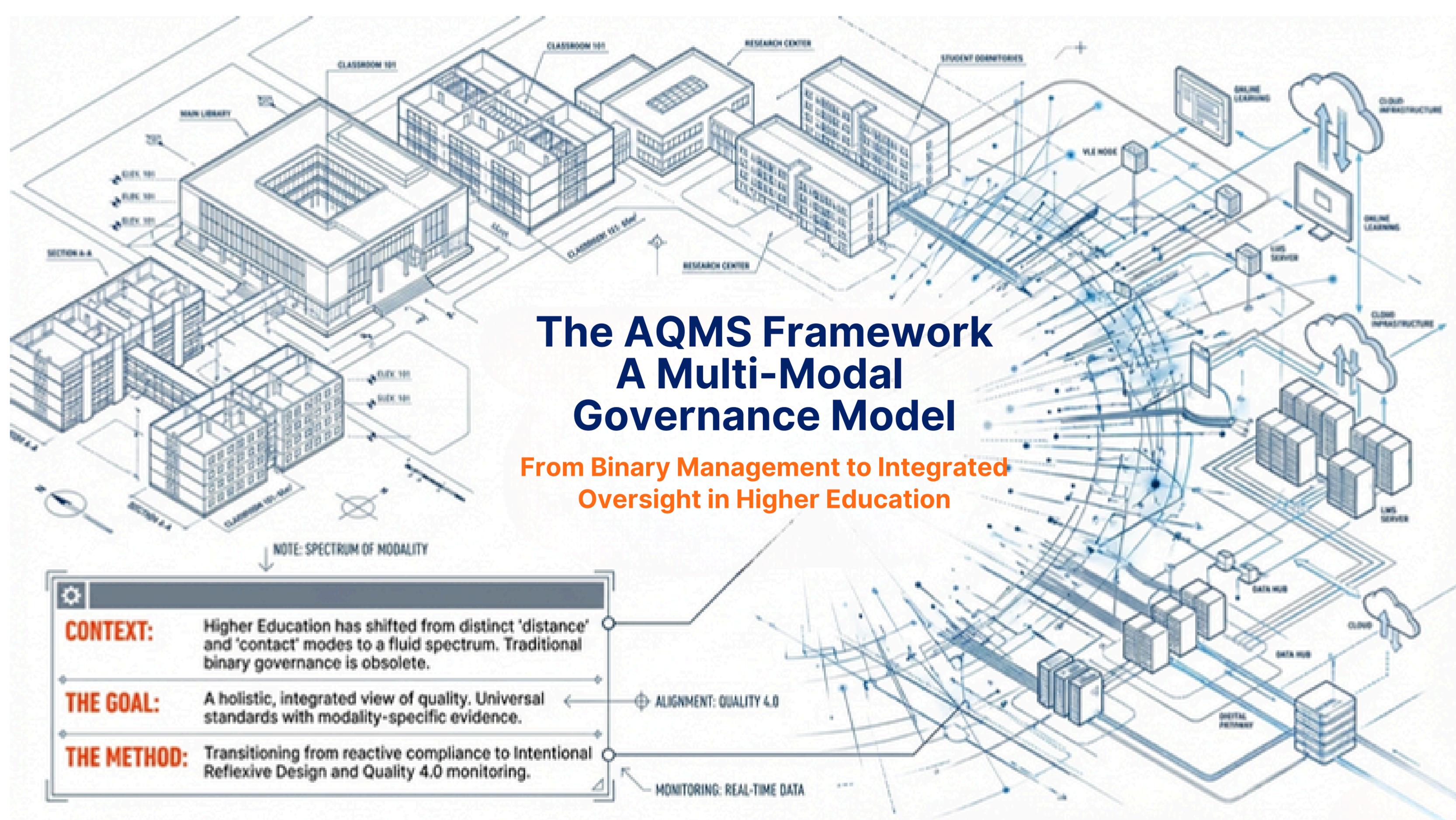
Reject 'tick-box' compliance in favour of meaningful data relevant to the modality.

03 Technology Must Enable, Not Just Record

Use AI and Dashboards to create active feedback loops, not just passive archives.

04 Quality as an Access Issue

Rigorous QA is the only way to ethically widen participation and protect learners.



The AQMS Framework A Multi-Modal Governance Model

From Binary Management to Integrated Oversight in Higher Education

NOTE: SPECTRUM OF MODALITY

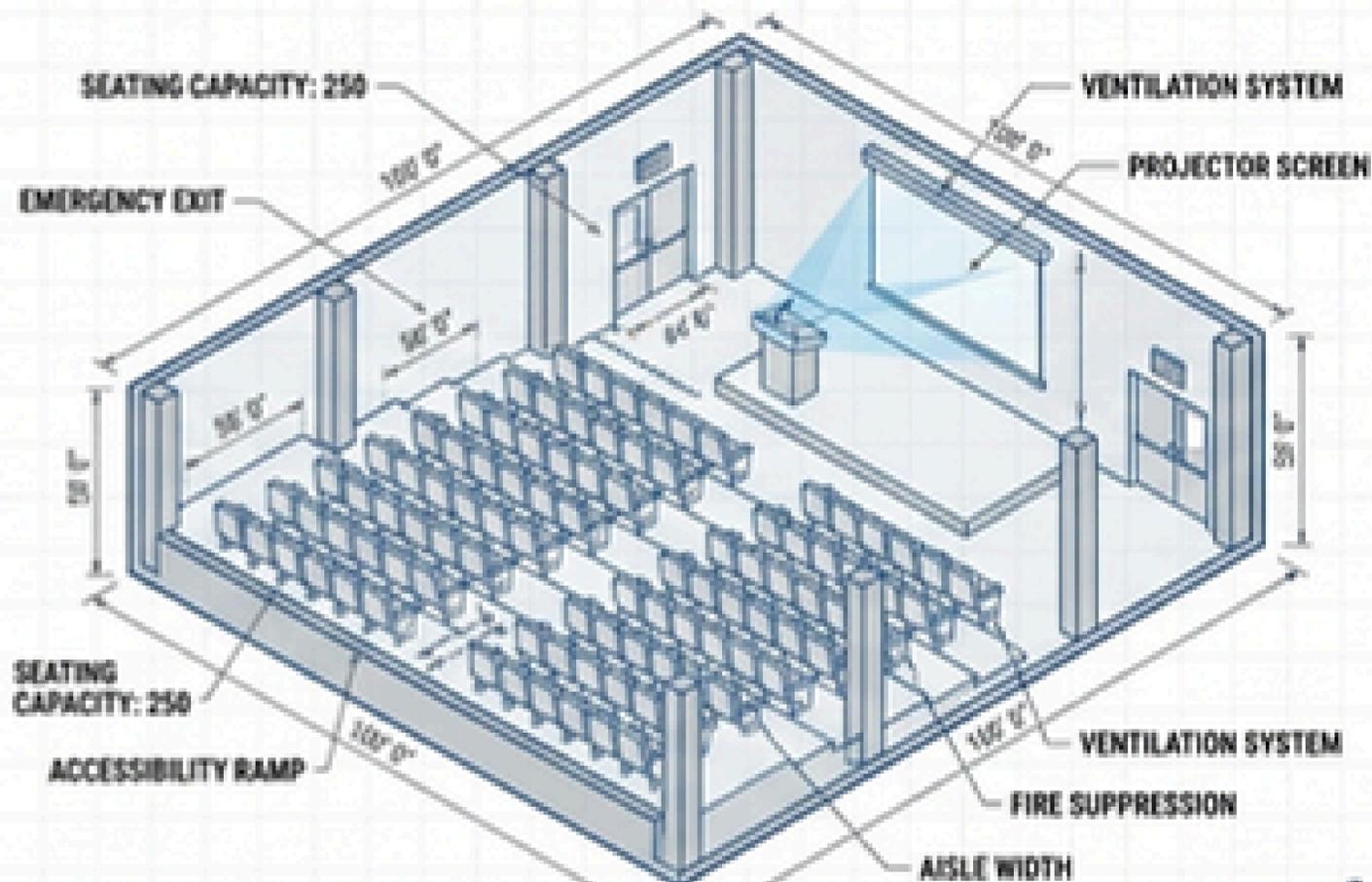
	CONTEXT: Higher Education has shifted from distinct 'distance' and 'contact' modes to a fluid spectrum. Traditional binary governance is obsolete.
	THE GOAL: A holistic, integrated view of quality. Universal standards with modality-specific evidence.
	THE METHOD: Transitioning from reactive compliance to Intentional Reflexive Design and Quality 4.0 monitoring.

ALIGNMENT: QUALITY 4.0

MONITORING: REAL-TIME DATA

EVIDENCE IN ACTION: INFRASTRUCTURE & ENVIRONMENT

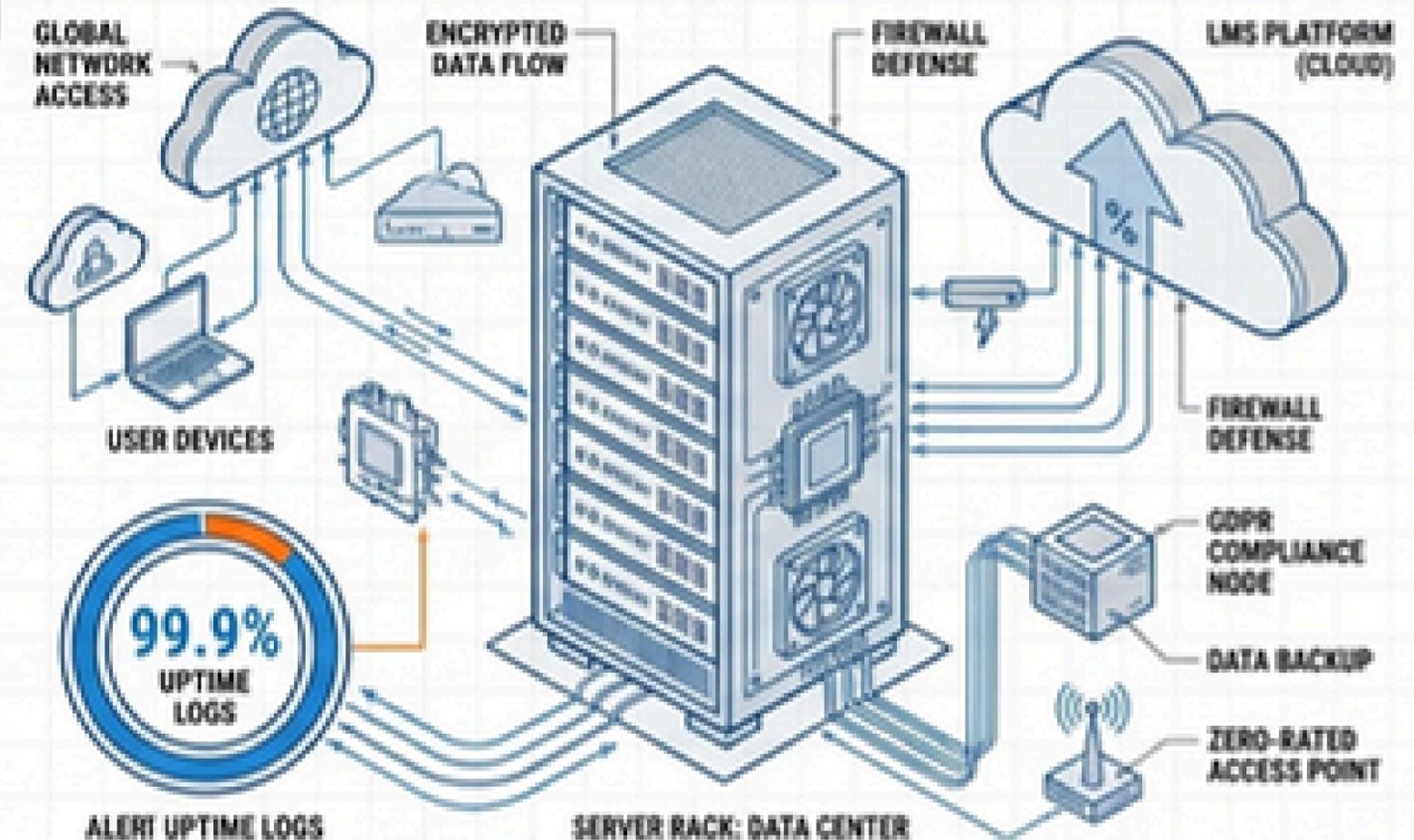
CONTACT MODE (Physical)



- Venue capacity reports.
- Health & Safety certificates.
- Physical library access logs.



ONLINE MODE (Digital)



- Cyber-security protocols (GDPR/POPIA).
- LMS Uptime Logs (99.9% availability).
- 'Digital Walkthroughs' of the learning path.
- Zero-rated data access agreements (Equity Check).



Equity is a 'Wicked Problem' that rigid QA cannot solve

Wicked Problem:

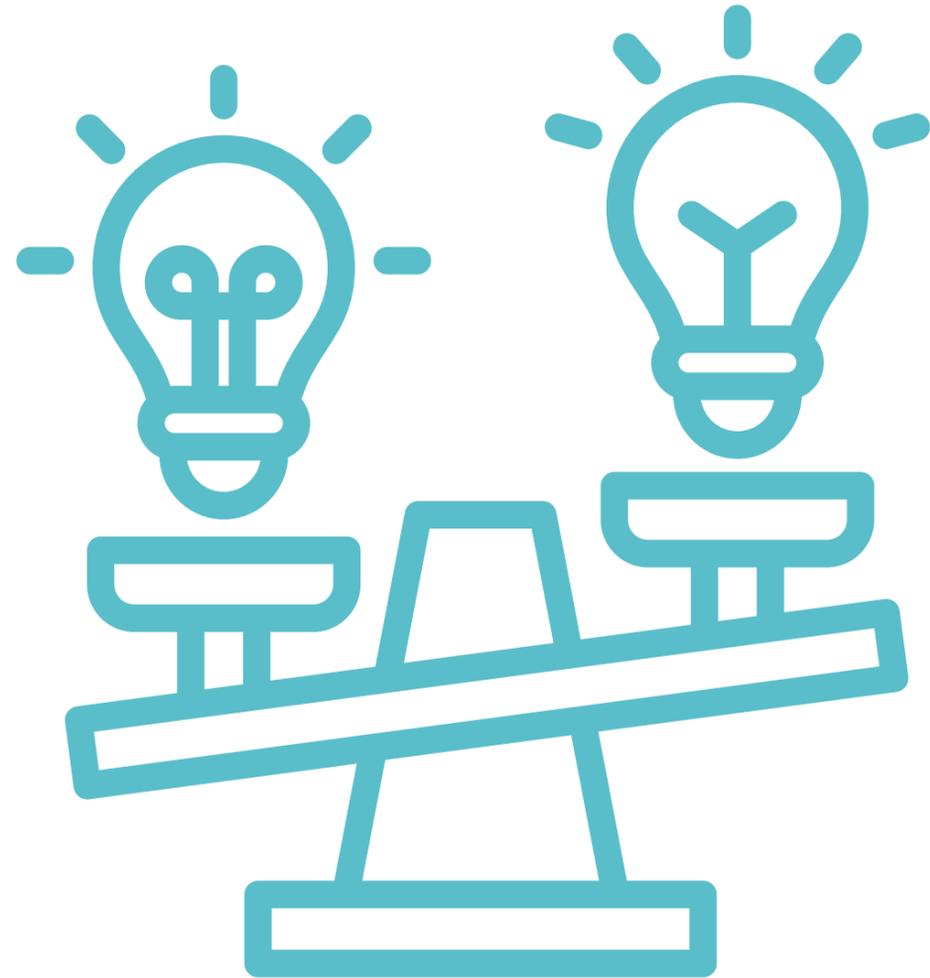
A complex issue with no single solution (e.g., balancing access with success).



Wicked Problem:

Standards must explicitly monitor the epistemological access across ALL modalities. We must ensure that the “**Universal**” outcome of critical thinking is not sacrificed in cost-effective “**Specific**” delivery models.

The dissolution of delivery binaries demands a shift from compliance to complexity.



- **Key Insights:** Diverse learning pathways must command equal recognition, rigour and societal value.
- **The Economic Reality:** To maintain value, QA must guarantee that 'different' does not mean 'lesser'.
- **The Goal:** Move beyond 'threshold compliance' (checking boxes) to 'reflexive governance' (proving the goal was met).

The Specifics: Logistics of time, pace and space must adapt to the modality.

Dimension

Synchronous / Contact

Asynchronous / Distance

Time and Pace

Fixed schedule, immediate engagement

Flexible schedule, time-lagged interaction, student requires high student autonomy.

Space

Shared physical or virtual location.

Geographically dispersed, transactional distance bridged by media and tutorials.

QA Requirement

Monitor attendance and classroom interaction.

Monitor desentralised distribution of resources and support systems.

Key Takeaway: 'One-size fits all' QA destroys innovation. Asynchronous modalities must measure 'transactional distance' management, not seat time.

The South African AQMS transforms 'Compliance' into 'Reflexive Governance'



Old Paradigm: Compliance

Did you teach for 40 hours?



Differentiation

Recognising institutional maturity and specific modalities



New Paradigm: Reflexive Governance

How does your specific modality achieve the exit-level outcome?

South Africa's Council on Higher Education's Quality Assurance Framework explicitly allows for this differentiation. The Academic Quality Management System (AQMS) acts as the governance framework that flexes QA processes without compromising universal standards.