

Mauritius Institute of Education

Understanding Notional Learning Hours: A Guide to Student Workload

Prepared by
Quality Assurance Division

December 2024

1.0 Introduction

In higher education, Notional Learning Hours (NLH) indicates the estimated time that a typical learner, at a specific academic level, is expected to invest in order to achieve the set learning outcomes of a course or module. This time includes a range of structured and independent learning activities, each contributing to the development of knowledge and competencies within a module.

The concept of Notional Learning Hours is pivotal in higher education for defining the expected amount of learner effort required to achieve specific learning outcomes.

The need for a standardised approach is driven by variations in course delivery and student experiences, necessitating a framework that uniformly applies across all programmes. This report provides an overview of NLH, including their purpose, components, and detailed examples of related activities. It highlights the purpose of NLH from a student workload perspective, using clear definitions and practical examples, and introduces a structured MIS to support transparency in workload expectations.

This NLH framework, with its detailed breakdown of contact hours, self-study, assessment hours, and other learning activities, aligns with the HEC accreditation requirements.

1.1 Rationale

The implementation of a standardised NLH framework is essential to:

- Ensure a balanced approach to educational activities, avoiding student overload and enhancing learning efficiency.
- Provide clarity and consistency in course structuring, facilitating better student planning and engagement.
- Align the MIE with HEC's accreditation requirements and SADC's ACTS.

1.2 Scope

The report aims to support academic staff in designing well-balanced modules, fostering an educational environment where students can succeed without being overwhelmed, thereby enhancing both the learning experience and programme effectiveness. By defining the various components of NLH, this report will guide faculty in structuring courses to align with international standards and support students in achieving learning outcomes efficiently.

Through this report, academic staff will gain insights into:

- **Key Components of NLH:** Explanation of contact hours, self-directed learning (including self-study, assessment, and other learning activities), and how each component contributes to the total NLH.
- **Guiding Principles for NLH Allocation: Best** practices for balancing contact and self-directed learning hours to prevent student overload and promote effective learning.
- **Standardised Reporting of NLH in the Module Information Sheet (MIS):** A structured approach for recording and communicating NLH to students, ensuring transparency and consistency across modules.

2.0 Activities for Notional Learning Hours

Notional Learning Hours represent the total time a learner is expected to invest in achieving the learning outcomes of a module. They encompass a wide range of activities that support knowledge acquisition, skill development and application.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of various learning activities and their descriptions.

Table 1: Types of Learning Activities and Descriptions

Learning Activity	Description
Pre-Lecture Preparation	Reading assigned materials, preparing notes, and reviewing previous lectures to build foundational understanding before attending class.
Active Participation in Classes - Lectures - Seminars and Tutorials	Attending instructor-led sessions that introduce and explain core topics. Engaging in discussions and small-group activities to deepen understanding and encourage critical thinking.
Practical and Applied Learning - Laboratory Sessions and Field Work - Workshops	Participating in hands-on exercises to apply theoretical knowledge in controlled or real-world settings. Attending specialized training sessions that focus on practical skills and techniques relevant to the field of study.
Online Learning Engagement	Completing online courses, engaging with digital resources, participating in virtual discussions, and using online tools to supplement classroom learning.
Research and Inquiry-Based Learning - Independent Research - Group Research	Conducting individual research to explore topics in depth. Collaborating on research projects that promote teamwork and collective problem-solving.
Assessment Preparation and Completion - Preparation for Assessments - Formative Assessments - Summative Assessments	Reviewing materials, practicing problems, and studying to prepare for various forms of evaluation. Engaging in quizzes, draft submissions, and practice tests that provide feedback for improvement. Completing major evaluations, such as exams, projects, dissertations, and presentations, that assess overall achievement of learning outcomes.

<p>Assignments and Project Work - Individual Assignments</p> <p>- Group Projects</p>	<p>Working on essays, reports, dissertations, and problem sets independently to demonstrate comprehension and application.</p> <p>Collaborating with peers on assignments that require collective effort and the application of learned skills.</p>
<p>Problem-Solving and Applied Project Work</p>	<p>Engaging in practical exercises, case studies, and applied projects that develop critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.</p>
<p>Consultations with Tutors</p>	<p>Engaging with tutors through face-to-face meetings, online sessions, or email communication to receive guidance, clarification, and feedback on academic progress.</p>
<p>Practical Placements and Work-Integrated Learning - Practicums and Internships</p> <p>- School Placements</p>	<p>Applying theoretical knowledge in a real-world context, such as in professional placements, to gain practical experience.</p> <p>Immersive learning experiences that connect academic study with teaching practice.</p>

2.1 Framework for Notional Learning Hours

Figure 1 provides an overview of the NLH made up of two main components: **Contact Hours** and **Self-Directed Learning Hours**. Each component plays a crucial role in ensuring that students achieve the learning outcomes of a course through a balanced approach. Self-directed learning comprises activities that students undertake independently, without direct instructor supervision and outside of scheduled class time. It includes time for self-study, assessment, and other learning activities that contribute to comprehensive learning and allowing them to engage deeply with course material at their own pace.

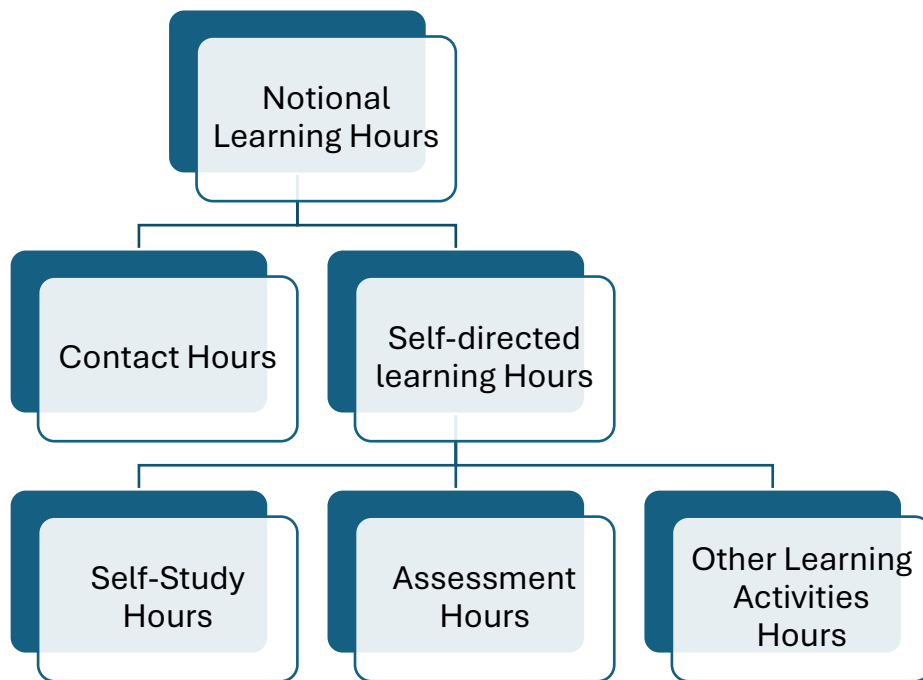


Figure 1: Components of Notional Learning Hours

2.1.1 Contact Hours

Contact time refers to structured learning activities where students interact directly with tutors either face-to-face or through virtual platforms or in a blended mode. These sessions are designed to impart new knowledge, demonstrate techniques, or guide students through complex topics.

Table 2 captures each form of contact hour, highlighting its purpose and the type of interaction it fosters.

Contact hours encompass a variety of structured interactions, each designed to support different aspects of the learning journey, from knowledge acquisition in lectures to skill development in practical sessions and personalised guidance in one-on-one meetings. These diverse forms of contact provide a balanced foundation for achieving academic and professional competencies.

Table 2: Form of Contact Hour

Form of Contact Hour	Description
In-Person and Virtual Instruction	Includes both physical classroom settings and virtual platforms (e.g., video conferencing, online forums) for direct engagement with tutors.
Lectures	Group sessions where tutors present foundational knowledge and core concepts to a broad audience.
Small Group Sessions	Tutorials, seminars, and workshops conducted in smaller groups for interactive discussions and collaborative learning.
Practical Sessions and Demonstrations	Hands-on experiences such as lab sessions, studio workshops, and site visits where tutors provide demonstrations and supervised practice to develop practical skills.
Tutorials	Sessions, either one-on-one or in groups, where students receive feedback on assessed work, helping them understand progress and areas for improvement. This personalized support, offered during “office hours” or via email/virtual platforms, allows for flexible engagement with tutors.

2.1.2 Self-Study Hours

Self-study hours encompass independent learning activities that students undertake autonomously to deepen their understanding of material introduced during contact hours. These activities emphasise independent learning, which is a distinguishing feature of higher education, encouraging students to take responsibility for their academic growth. Self-study may include preparation for scheduled sessions, follow-up work, additional reading and practice, including hands-on practical activities, to reinforce learning. Self-study is continuous and helps students build a strong foundation for understanding course material.

Self-study supports independent as well as collaborative activities, such as group discussions and peer learning, providing students with a flexible approach to reinforce and expand on course material without the direct involvement of the instructor.

Table 3 provides an overview of self-study activities, emphasising the importance of independent learning in higher education. Self-study activities may include individual tasks as well as collaborative efforts like group work and peer discussions, allowing students to reinforce course content through shared learning experiences, all outside of scheduled contact hours.

Table 3: Form of Self-Study activities

Self-Study Activity	Description
Problem-Solving and Practice	Working on exercises, case studies, or practice problems to apply concepts learned in class, either individually or collaboratively.
Research and Reading	Exploring supplementary materials and conducting independent or group research to gain deeper insights into course topics.
Review of Lecture Notes	Revisiting and summarizing lecture notes to reinforce core concepts, either alone or through peer discussions.
Software Tool Practice	Practicing with relevant software or tools to improve technical skills and confidence in their use.
Session Preparation and Follow-Up	Preparing for upcoming classes or reviewing material from previous sessions with classmates or alone to to strengthen understanding and retention.
Wider Reading and Exploration	Expanding knowledge on related topics through additional readings, online resources and informal study groups.
Group Work and Peer Discussions	Engaging in collaborative discussions or group study sessions to share perspectives, clarify concepts, and deepen understanding.
Practical Hands-On	Engaging in real-world tasks and experiments that reinforce theoretical knowledge, allowing students to apply concepts in a tangible and interactive manner.

2.1.3 Assessment Hours

Assessment hours are dedicated specifically to activities related to preparing for, and participating in, formal assessments. These activities are designed to help students consolidate knowledge and demonstrate their understanding of the course material through exams, assignments, projects, and other evaluative tasks.

Assessment hours focus on activities that directly support a student’s readiness for formal evaluations as

Assessment hours are specifically allocated to activities that prepare students for formal evaluations. These hours support readiness for exams, assignments, projects, and presentations.

shown in Table 4. They are essential for measuring academic progress and ensuring students are adequately prepared to demonstrate their learning in graded tasks. “Assessment preparation hours” refer specifically to the time you dedicate to preparing for a graded task, such as assignments, presentations, or exams. This includes activities like researching, drafting, revising, practicing, and reviewing specific material for assessments.

Table 4: Form of Assessment activities

Assessment Activity	Description
Exam Preparation	Focused study and review of key concepts, topics, and practice problems in preparation for exams.
Project Work and Assignment Completion	Time spent drafting, editing, and finalizing projects, essays, and other major assignments for assessment.
Practice Tests and Mock Exams	Engaging in practice tests or mock exams to gauge readiness and identify areas needing further review.
Group Study for Assessments	Collaborative study sessions specifically organized to review material for upcoming tests or exams.
Presentation Preparation	Preparing, rehearsing, and refining presentations that are part of the assessment criteria.
Feedback Review and Improvements	Reviewing instructor feedback on past assessments and making necessary improvements or adjustments.

2.1.4 Other Learning Activities Hours

Other Learning Activities refer to experiential learning opportunities that extend beyond formal contact hours and self-study. These activities primarily include Supervised Placements and Practice Hours, as recommended by HEC, which focuses on structured professional placements embedded within modules to enrich knowledge through real-world application. Such placements offer valuable hands-on experience, connecting academic theory to practical skills in a professional setting.

These activities also include attending academic conferences, seminars and workshops that expose students to broader work-based insights

Other learning activities refer to experiential learning outside formal contact hours and self-study. This includes placements, professional events, and academic conferences that enhance real-world knowledge.

and current developments in their field. While not part of formal instruction, these activities contribute to a well-rounded educational experience, offering collaborative learning, peer support, and professional engagement, as outlined in Table 5.

Table 5: Other Learning Activities Supporting the Learning Process

Learning Activity	Description
School Placements	Immersive teaching practice, allowing students to apply academic learning in educational settings.
Professional Placements	Real-world experience in a professional environment.
Academic Conferences and Seminars	Attending external events to gain broader perspectives in the field of study.

2.2 Notional learning hours and academic credit

In the framework of higher education, NLH provide a standardized measure to represent the total time a student is expected to dedicate to meet the learning outcomes of a module or course. The guideline adopted is: 1 academic credit is equivalent to 10 notional learning hours. This approach ensures consistency across modules and offers a clear structure for planning and allocating time.

1 credit = 10 Notional learning hours

Minimum

recommended ratio

of Contact hours: self-directed learning

hours = 1:2

A recommended minimum ratio of contact hours to self-directed learning hours is 1:2. This means that for every hour of instructor-led contact time, students are expected to engage in at least two hours of self-directed learning activities. The 1:2 ratio is designed to encourage independent learning, a core aspect of higher education, where students actively engage with content outside structured sessions to reinforce and expand their understanding.

To help clarify the concept, an example illustrating how notional learning hours are allocated for a typical module worth 10 credits is shown below.

EXAMPLE:

- **Credit** = 10
- **Notional Learning Hours** = $10 \times 10 = 100$ hours
- **Contact Hours:** 30 hours
- **Self-Study Hours:** 60 hours
- **Assessment Hours:** 10 hours
- **Other Learning Activities Hours:** 0 hours
- **Self-Directed Learning Hours Calculation:** Self-Study Hours + Assessment Hours + Other Learning Activities Hours = $60 + 10 + 0 = 70$ hours
- **Ratio of Contact Hours to Self-Directed Learning Hours:** 30 : 70 (meets the minimum recommended ratio of 1 : 2 = 30 : 60)

2.2.1 The Module Information Sheet (MIS)

An essential part of implementing the NLH framework involves using a standardised Module Information Sheet (MIS) as shown in Appendix 1. The MIS clearly outlines the allocation of NLH for each module, providing a detailed breakdown of:

- **Contact Hours:** Time spent in direct instruction, such as lectures, tutorials, or practical sessions.
- **Assessment Hours:** Time allocated for preparing and completing assessments.
- **Self-Study Hours:** Independent learning activities like reading, research, and review.
- **Other Learning Activities Hours:** Collaborative activities, group work, and academic events.

This structure ensures transparency for students, providing them with a clear understanding of the expected workload and how time should be allocated across different learning activities. The MIS also supports faculty by setting clear workload expectations and enhancing consistency across academic programmes.

3.0 Conclusion

The Notional Learning Hours (NLH) framework provides a robust structure for managing student workload and ensuring consistency in academic credit allocation. By defining clear categories—Contact Hours, Self-Directed Learning, Assessment Hours, and Other Learning Activities—this framework supports a balanced approach that fosters both guided instruction and independent learning. The recommended 1:2 ratio of contact hours to self-directed learning encourages students to take responsibility for their academic growth while allowing faculty to maintain sustainable workloads.

The use of a standardised Module Information Sheet (MIS) further enhances transparency, providing students with a clear breakdown of time expectations and enabling them to plan their studies effectively. This alignment not only strengthens academic rigour but also enhances the student experience by setting realistic, manageable expectations for time commitment and workload across different modules.

Appendix 1



Mauritius Institute of Education
Quality Assurance Division

QA 30: MODULE INFORMATION SHEET

Semester: _____

Year: _____

1. General Information

Programme of Study	
Cohort	
Level	
Module Title	
Module Code	
Pre-requisite Module	
Lecturer(s)	
Email(s)	
Mode of Delivery	
Credit	
Module Duration	

2. Module Aims & Outcomes

Aim(s)	
Learning Outcomes	

3. Student Workload Distribution

Components	Hours	Details
Contact Hours		

<i>(Instructor-led sessions where core concepts are delivered. This includes lectures, seminars, tutorials, practical sessions, and demonstrations.)</i>		
Assessment Hours <i>(Dedicated to preparing for and participating in formal assessments, including assignments, projects, class tests, written exams, etc.)</i>		
Self-Study Hours <i>(Refers to independent learning activities, either individually or collaboratively, that deepen understanding of material introduced during contact hours. These activities include preparation for sessions, follow-up work, additional reading, and hands-on practice.)</i>		
Other Learning Activities Hours <i>(Include experiential learning opportunities such as supervised placements and teaching practice hours.)</i>		
Self-directed Learning Hours <i>(Self-Study Hours + Assessment Hours + Other Learning Activities Hours)</i>		Ratio Contact Hours: Self-Directed Learning Hours
Total Notional Hours <i>(Contact Hours + Self-directed learning Hours)</i>		

4. Important Dates

Semester dates	
Mid Semester week	
Administration of Student Feedback Questionnaire	

5. Assessment Details

Note	80 % attendance rules and regulations apply				
I	Coursework	Weightage (%)	Dates	Submission Modality	Duration and Additional Information
II	Written Examination				

6. Academic Integrity

Plagiarism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Similarity Index: 2. Students are expected to submit work that is their own and properly cited. [Link to Plagiarism Policy]
AI Generated Text	Unauthorized reliance on AI for content generation without proper attribution may result in academic misconduct. [Link to AI Policy]

7. Module Map

Week/ Session No.	Content Details	Strategy	Lecturer
1			
2			
3			
4			

5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			
14			
15			

8. Recommended/ Supplementary Readings