Quality Assurance Code of Practice

Distance Learning Provision

1. Purpose and scope

1.1 The purpose of this statement is to set out mechanisms for the quality assurance of:

a. distance learning and
b. work-based learning on distance learning programmes.

1.2 Distance learning is learning which takes place remotely from the University but which is part of a programme or unit of study. Distance learning programmes may be delivered through paper based materials, a virtual learning environment, travelling teachers, use of local agents or partner organisations.

1.3 Work-based learning is learning that is integral to the programme of study and is usually achieved and demonstrated through engagement with a workplace environment, the assessment of reflective practice and the designation of appropriate learning outcomes. Work-based learning might also be described as “professional practice”.

1.4 This statement covers:

a. units and programmes of study designed and approved by the University and leading to an award or award of credit of the University but taught and/or supported at a distance
b. programmes or units taught at a distance, designed and approved by the University and leading to an award or award of credit of the University, where an overseas institution acts as a facilitator (including study centres providing a location for teaching)
c. the requirements of distance learning students in full or part time employment who use experience gained in their workplace to meet the learning outcomes of the programme i.e. “work-based learners”.

1.5 This statement does not cover arrangements for placement learning in which students undertake an agreed and negotiated period of learning away from the University, usually in employment, as part of their programme of study or arrangements for work-based learning where periods of study on campus or at a partner organisation are interspersed with short placements (i.e. Foundation Degrees). Provision for placement learning and work-based learning on foundation degrees is covered in QA6 Placement Learning and Study Abroad.

1.6 This statement should be read in conjunction with:

- QA20 - Collaborative Provision, if collaboration with a partner institution is intended
- QA3 - Approval of New Programmes of Study
- QA4 - Amendments to Programmes and Approval of New Units.
2. **Principles**

2.1. The University promotes inclusive and flexible learning provision in order to respond to student diversity and to the needs of practising professionals.

2.2. Work-based learning contributes to a student’s personal and professional development and thereby improves their employment prospects.

2.3. The University aims to secure the high quality and standard of units, programmes and awards taught and supported on a distance learning basis ensuring comparability with programmes delivered on campus of a similar nature.

3. **Roles and responsibilities**

3.1 It is the responsibility of Academic Programmes Committee to give strategic approval for new distance learning programmes, ensuring that they are set within the context of the University’s Mission and are compatible with the University Strategy 2013-16.

3.2 Programmes and Partnerships Approval Committee is responsible for approving new distance learning programmes and ensuring that arrangements are in place to provide an effective distance learning experience.

3.3 It is the responsibility of Boards of Studies to approve the appointment of all staff outside the academic and research job family who teach on distance learning programmes.

3.4 It is the role of Careers and Employability Subcommittee to monitor and make recommendations to University Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee on the direction of provision for work-based learning across the Faculties/School.

3.5 Directors of Administration are responsible for ensuring that appropriate administration and support is provided for distance learning programmes.

3.6 The Head of Department is responsible for ensuring that new programmes with a distance learning element are developed in accordance with the principles in this statement.

3.7 Director of Studies (Postgraduate Taught Students) are responsible for ensuring that students on distance learning programmes have access to appropriate resources, learning opportunities and support in order to meet the learning outcomes of the programme.

3.8 The Programme Team are academic and administrative staff involved in teaching and supporting students throughout their programme.

4. **Approval of distance learning programmes**

4.1. When developing new programmes of study, advice should be sought from Departments/School with expertise in the area of distance learning (e.g. Health/Education) and from the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office.

4.2 In establishing new distance learning programmes, the process in QA3 Approval of New Programmes should be followed. In addition to the requirements of QA3, the following information should be provided to Programmes and Partnerships Approval Committee to
ensure that appropriate academic standards and learning environment can be achieved within the distance learning infrastructure:

a. details of the logistical and administrative arrangements to ensure effective co-ordination of the programme and any residential elements, if appropriate, taking full account of considerations specific to teaching and supporting students at a distance
b. details of the proposed learning materials and delivery mechanisms
c. an outline of the roles and responsibilities of the different parties involved if delivered in collaboration with a partner institution (inc. details of reporting arrangements)
d. details of the responsibilities and financial agreements with the relevant academic Department/School/Learning partnerships Office (LPO), if applicable
e. confirmation that all learning materials will be of appropriate quality and that all technologies and systems used have undergone testing to ensure suitability of the mode of delivery. Contingency plans in case of technical systems failure should be in place
f. details of the periodic review arrangements for distance learning materials and the programme/unit as a whole (for further information see QA13 Degree Scheme Reviews)
g. quality assurance procedures including information on student support mechanisms, communication methods, assistance available for students with disabilities, student feedback, assessment arrangements, feedback to students on assessed work, student access to tutors, arrangements for External Examiners (including sampling of work), monitoring of student progression.

4.3 As set out in QA20 Collaborative Provision, if the programme is delivered in collaboration with a partner institution the following additional information will also be required:

a. copy of the draft Institutional Agreements and programme level agreements (University template available) or other relevant contracts supporting aspects of distance learning e.g. for study facilities provided by overseas institutions
b. the scope and limitations of the arrangements
c. the role and responsibilities of all parties
d. the learning resources and support facilities available
e. the proposed reporting and review mechanisms
f. CVs of staff with teaching or assessment responsibilities
g. details of the results of independent checks of any local law relating to the provision of higher education
h. details of the health and safety policies and procedures
i. details with regard to copyright in any teaching and learning materials (these must be included in the Institutional Agreement).

4.4 Where elements of the programme are delivered or assessed through a local agent, information on arrangements for delivery or assessment should be provided to PAPAC. PAPAC should be assured of the quality of these arrangements.

5. **Evaluation of learning opportunities**

5.1 At the point of admission students should confirm that they have understood the requirements of studying on a distance learning programme.

5.2 Where a student is using their place of work to achieve some or all of the learning outcomes of the programme, at admission:
a. it should be verified that there are no ethical or commercial considerations which might prevent the student from using their place of work to collect data and/or complete their programme
b. students should be encouraged to consider and disclose any limitations in using their workplace to complete their studies
c. it should be confirmed that the student has appropriate learning opportunities in their place of work to complete the programme. If the student’s workplace does not provide all the opportunities they require to complete the programme, it will be necessary for appropriate supplementary opportunities to be identified by the student with support from the programme team. Where work-based learning students undertake a placement outside their normal workplace the placement should be evaluated as set out in QA6 Placement Learning and Study Abroad
d. the student should be encouraged to sign a learning agreement with their employer
e. the work-based learning provider should be identified as the responsible authority for all matters relating to Health and Safety, equalities and diversity and employment legislation.

6. Support for students

6.1 Prior to the start of a distance learning programme/unit of study, as set out in QA44 Information to Students, all students should be issued with a handbook. The programme handbook should set out students’ responsibilities as distance learners and, where applicable, work-based learners and provide them with details of the programme, including assessment requirements, a named contact for academic matters and their entitlements and expectations with regard to learning resources. Specific guidance should be given to CPD students who may take units separately and therefore not have access to all the handbook information relating to each mainstream programme from which units may be drawn.

6.2 Prior to the start of a distance learning programme/unit of study, students should receive information regarding the support mechanisms available to them including information on the personal tutoring system, a clear schedule for the availability and delivery of study materials, availability of technical support (accessing Moodle, etc) and for the assessment of their work, appropriate feedback mechanisms, access to tutors and appropriate communication methods.

6.3 Both anticipatory and reasonable adjustments should be used for open learning, distance learning and all other forms of off-campus learning in consideration of disabled students. Advice is available from the Student Disability Advice team.

6.4 The appointment of a work-based (or practice based) mentor to provide professional support and advice to work-based learners is strongly encouraged. Alumni are well placed to provide this support.

6.5 It is the responsibility of the programme team to maintain regular contact with work-based learners to ensure that they have adequate learning opportunities to achieve the learning outcomes of the unit or programme.

7. Assessment

7.1 Assessment should be undertaken in accordance with University regulations and guidelines. Exams carried out remotely should be overseen by a local agent. Where marking is undertaken at a distance, mechanisms should be in place for the effective moderation of work within the Department/School to ensure comparability of standards with on-campus provision. Deadlines issued for the submission of work by students based abroad, particularly in different time zones
or when using shared facilities (e.g. a computer based in a library in a local university or college), should take these circumstances into consideration. Directors of Studies are available for advice, where appropriate, in such cases.

7.2 Where employers are involved in the assessment of work-based learning they must be appropriately qualified and receive appropriate support and guidance. Any assessment undertaken by an employer should be moderated by a member of University staff.

7.3 As set out in QA12 External Examining, all External Examiners should be appointed by the relevant Board of Studies. Where possible, the same External Examiner should be appointed with responsibility for programmes which are offered on a distance learning basis and taught on campus.

8. Premature termination of work-based learning opportunity

8.1 If a student’s workplace ceases to provide the necessary learning opportunities to meet the learning outcomes of the programme or if the student ceases to be in employment, the programme team will support the student in finding further work-based learning opportunities.

8.2 If a student is unable to find a suitable environment in which to achieve the learning outcomes of the programme, the Director of Studies may have to ask the student to withdraw from the programme.

9. Use of technology

9.1 Where technology is used as a primary delivery mechanism and for the purposes of summative assessments, only institutionally-supported technologies (e.g. Moodle, Turnitin, etc) should be used and contingency plans in case of technical failure should be in place and clearly communicated. Students should have a clear point of contact to support their use of technology on the programme.

10. Equipping staff to undertake their roles

10.1 As set out in QA9 Development of all Staff and Students Undertaking Teaching Activities, staff associated with the development and delivery of all distance learning and work-based learning programmes should receive appropriate support and development particularly in the use of technology. Appropriate arrangements for peer observation and review should be made.

11. Monitoring and review

11.1 Appropriate mechanisms, such as unit and programme evaluation surveys, should be employed to ensure effective feedback from students on all aspects of their learning experience. Where possible, representation on University committees should be encouraged either in person or via web-based methods.

11.2 Monitoring and review of distance learning provision will be carried out by the relevant Departmental and Faculty/School Learning, Teaching and Quality Committees.

11.3 Periodic review of these procedures affecting distance learning provision will be undertaken by the University Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement Details</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issue Version:</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
<td>01 August 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Antecedents:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QAA Guidelines on the quality of distance learning; Incorporated into and referenced by:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QAA Code of Practice, Section 2, Collaborative Provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning), Part B</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Assurance Committee</td>
<td>September 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 June 2006, Minute 623(1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 July 2008, Minute 857(8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 July 2009, Minute 976(7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 July 2010, Minute 1096(4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(University) Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee</td>
<td>13 July 2011, Minute 121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 July 2012 Minute 278</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 July 2013 Minute 428</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 July 2014 Minute 552</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Related Documentation:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other QA Code of Practice statements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QAA Quality Code: Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Author:</strong></td>
<td>Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>