Quality Assurance Code of Practice

Distance Learning Provision

This document is primarily intended for:

Staff involved in the delivery to, or support of distance learning students and Student Apprentices

Heads of Departments/the School/LPO

First point of contact: Assistant Registrars in the Faculty/School

Contents

1   Purpose and scope

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

- distance learning,

- and work-based learning, to include apprenticeship courses

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

1.3   Work-based learning is learning that is integral to the course 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:

- units and courses 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

- courses 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)

- the requirements of distance learning students, including Student Apprentices in full or part time employment who use experience gained in their workplace to meet the learning outcomes of the course i.e., "work-based learners".

- 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 course 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.

1.5   This statement should be read in conjunction with:

- QA20 Collaborative Provision (if collaboration with a partner institution is intended)

- QA3 Approval of New Courses of Study

- QA4 Amendments to Courses of Study and Approval of New Units

2 Principles

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

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

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

3 Approval of distance learning courses, to include work-based learning

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

3.2 It is the responsibility of Academic Programmes Committee to give strategic approval for new distance learning courses, ensuring that they are set within the context of the University's Mission and are compatible with the University Strategy.

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 courses.

3.4 When developing new courses of study, advice should be sought from Departments/School with expertise in distance learning (e.g., Health/Education) and from the Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) and the Curriculum and Academic Development (CAD) teams in the Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLT).

3.5 In establishing new distance learning courses, the process in QA3 Approval of New Courses of Study should be followed. In addition to the requirements of QA3, the following information should be provided to Course and Partnerships Approval Committee (CPAC) to ensure that appropriate academic standards and learning environment can be achieved within the distance learning infrastructure:

- details of the logistical and administrative arrangements to ensure effective co-ordination of the course and any residential elements, if appropriate, taking full account of considerations specific to teaching and supporting students at a distance

- details of the proposed learning materials and delivery mechanisms

- 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

- an outline of the roles and responsibilities of the different parties involved if delivered in collaboration with a partner institution or employer partner (including details of reporting arrangements)

- details of the responsibilities and financial agreements with the relevant academic Department/School/Learning Partnerships Office (LPO), if applicable

- details of the periodic review arrangements for distance learning materials and the course/unit as a whole

- 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.

3.6   As set out in QA20 Collaborative Provision, if the course is delivered in collaboration with a partner institution additional information will also be required. Please refer to QA20 for full details.

3.7   Where elements of the course are delivered or assessed in conjunction with an employer partner, or through a local agent, information on arrangements for delivery or assessment should be provided to CPAC. CPAC should be assured of the quality of these arrangements.

4   Evaluation of learning opportunities

4.1   At the point of admission, students should confirm that they have understood the requirements of studying on a distance learning course.

4.2   Where a student is using their place of work to achieve some or all of the learning outcomes of the course, at admission:

- 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 course

- students should be encouraged to consider and disclose any limitations in using their workplace to complete their studies

- it should be confirmed that the student has appropriate learning opportunities in their place of work to complete the course. If the student's workplace does not provide all the opportunities, they require to complete the course, it will be necessary for appropriate supplementary opportunities to be identified by the student or the employer, with support from the course team (which includes both academic and administrative staff). Where work-based learning students undertake a placement outside their normal workplace the placement should be evaluated as set out in QA6 Placement Learning

- where this is not already required, the student and employer should be encouraged to sign a learning agreement. For an apprenticeship course, the University, Student Apprentice, and employer are required to sign the Training Plan for each Student Apprentice.

- 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 within the workplace.

5   Support for students

5.1   Directors of Studies (Postgraduate Taught Students) are responsible for ensuring that students on distance learning courses have access to appropriate resources, learning opportunities and support to meet the learning outcomes of the course.

5.2   Prior to the start of a distance learning course/unit of study, as set out in QA44 Course Handbooks and Course Specifications, all students should be issued with a handbook. The course handbook should set out students' responsibilities as distance learners and, where applicable, work-based learners and provide them with details of the course, including assessment requirements, a named contact for academic matters and their entitlements and expectations regarding 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 course from which units may be drawn.

5.3   Prior to the start of a distance learning course/unit of study, students should receive information regarding:

- the minimum technical specifications for electronic equipment which will be needed to undertake the unit/course e.g., for PCs, headsets, microphones etc.

- the schedule for the availability and delivery of study materials

- the support mechanisms available to them including information on the academic advising system, and availability of technical support (accessing virtual learning environments (VLEs) such as Moodle, etc.)

- the assessment feedback mechanisms, and access to tutors

- the appropriate communication methods.

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

5.5   Where it is not already prescribed, the appointment of a work-based (or practice based) mentor to provide professional support and advice to work-based learners is strongly encouraged. For an apprenticeship course, the employer is required to appoint a separate, identifiable line manager to provide professional support and advice to Student Apprentices.

5.6   It is the responsibility of the course team to maintain regular contact with work-based learners to ensure that they have adequate learning opportunities to achieve the learning outcomes of the course. For Student Apprentices this will be managed in consultation with the employer through the Tripartite Review process (QA33(A)).

6   Assessment

6.1   Assessment should be undertaken in accordance with University regulations and guidelines. Closed-book invigilated exams carried out remotely should be overseen by a local agent. Open-book/non-invigilated exam carried out remotely can be delivered, where appropriate, online via University-supported digital platforms. 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.

6.2   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 suitable member of University staff.

6.3   As set out in [QA12 External Examining (Taught Provision)](#), all External Examiners should be appointed by the relevant Board of Studies. Where possible, the same External Examiner should be appointed with responsibility for courses offered on a distance learning basis and taught on campus.

7   Premature termination of work-based learning opportunity

7.1   If a student's workplace ceases to provide the necessary learning opportunities to meet the learning outcomes of the course or if the student is made redundant, the course team will support the student in seeking suitable further work-based learning opportunities.

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

7.3   Where a Student Apprentice is made redundant more than six months before the planned end date of the apprenticeship and no issues with academic performance are identified, the University will endeavour to secure an alternative employer to enable of the Student Apprentice to complete the apprenticeship course. If this is not possible, the Director of Studies may have to ask the student to withdraw from the course.

7.4   If a Student Apprentice is made redundant within six months of the planned end date of the apprenticeship, the Student Apprentice may complete the apprenticeship course. In these circumstances, the University will act as a 'proxy employer' to provide any required employer competency statement.

8   Use of technology

8.1   Where technology is used as a primary delivery mechanism and for the purposes of summative assessments, only institutionally supported technologies (e.g., VLEs and plagiarism detection software and services) should be used and contingency plans in case of technical failure should be in place and clearly communicated. Directors of Studies should ensure that students have a clear point of contact to support their use of technology on the course. The named contacts should also be notified to the TEL team in the CLT to facilitate their support for this area.

9   Equipping staff to undertake their roles

9.1   As set out in [QA9 Professional Development and Recognition for All Staff and Students who Teach and Support Learning](#), staff associated with the development and delivery of all distance learning and work-based learning courses should receive

appropriate support and development particularly in the use of technology. Appropriate arrangements for peer observation and review should be made.

10   Monitoring and review

10.1   Appropriate mechanisms, such as student surveys (including unit evaluation), 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 remotely.

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

10.3   Periodic review of these procedures affecting distance learning provision will be undertaken by the University Education, Quality and Standards Committee.

10.4   The University Education, Quality and Standards Committee monitors the direction of provision for work-based learning across the Faculties/School.

10.5   The University Degree Apprenticeship Quality and Standards Group, reporting to the University Education, Quality and Standards Committee, monitors the direction of provision for apprenticeship courses across the Faculties/School**.**

Statement Details

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	5 June 2006 Minute 623(1)
	1 July 2008 Minute 857(8)
	3 July 2009 Minute 976(7)
	13 July 2010 Minute 1096(4)
	(University) Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee:
	13 July 2011 Minute 121
	10 July 2012 Minute 278
	9 July 2013 Minute 428
	8 July 2014 Minute 552
	7 July 2015 Minute 671
	5 July 2016 Minute 807
	11 July 2017 Minute 940
	22 May 2018 Minute 1040
	16 July 2019 Minute 1197
	Education Quality and Standards Committee:
	22 September 2023 (via correspondence)
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Related Documentation:	All other QA Code of Practice statements
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