



## QA48 Annex 3 – Student Engagement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement for Distance Provision

### 1. Purpose and Scope

- 1.1 This Annex sets out the arrangements and responsibilities governing student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement (QA&E) of teaching, learning and academic experience for those courses with primarily distance learning provision leading to a University of Bath award. This applies specifically to:
  - Courses delivered fully online
  - Courses with limited on-campus components, such as optional or compulsory short residential periods
- 1.2 It defines how student engagement with QA&E of the academic experience is delivered in practice and supports the implementation of QA48 for those cohorts of students that meet the definition above.
- 1.3 This Annex should be read alongside QA48, which defines institutional expectations for student engagement in QA&E across all modes of study.
- 1.4 Ongoing informal dialogue between staff and students is a core feature of the learning environment. Formal representation structures, including Distance-Staff Student Liaison Committees (D-SSLCs), detailed below, provide an additional structured mechanism through which students can contribute to quality assurance, enhancement and decision making.
- 1.5 The University ensures that distance learner engagement with QA&E processes are:
  - Open to all students in the cohort
  - Allows for meaningful influence on decision-making
  - Demonstrates clear impact and feedback to students
- 1.6 Please note that student engagement in QA&E processes for UG and PGT on-campus courses are detailed in Annex 1 and for Doctoral Programmes are outlined in Annex 2 and differ in important ways from those outlined here.

## 2. Study Mode Specific Requirements

- 2.1 Engagement mechanisms for distance learners must reflect the distinctive characteristics of distance and online study and ensure equitable opportunities to contribute to QA&E. In particular, arrangements must:
- Accommodate differences in location and time zone, ensuring that students can participate regardless of geographical constraints
  - Recognise that distance learning study may not follow a typical academic cycle
  - Recognise that distance learners have limited or no access to campus-based interaction
  - Acknowledge cohort spread and access to smaller peer networks relative to on-campus student cohorts
  - Reflect the online and digitally mediated academic experience, including teaching delivery, learning design, and access to academic resources and support
  - Provide opportunities for both asynchronous and synchronous engagement, with asynchronous engagement as the primary mode where required
  - Ensure flexibility to support students with work, caring or professional commitments, enabling participation at times that suit their circumstances
  - Support engagement across dispersed or small cohorts, including through open or course-level engagement models where appropriate
  - Ensure that engagement mechanisms are accessible and inclusive, including through the use of appropriate digital platforms and formats
  - Enable distance learners to contribute meaningfully to QA&E processes and decision-making.

## 3. Individual Student Engagement

- 3.1 The University enables all distance learners to contribute individually to QA&E of their academic experience through structured feedback mechanisms, primarily student surveys.
- 3.2 Feedback from individual engagement must be:
- systematically analysed;
  - considered alongside other sources of evidence; and
  - used to inform decision-making at programme, Faculty/School and institutional level.
- 3.3 Responsibility for responding to survey feedback rests with:
- Unit convenors or equivalent for unit-level matters
  - Directors of Studies or equivalent for course-level matters
  - Associate Deans-Education for Faculty/School-level matters
  - The Learning Partnerships Office or Pro-Vice Chancellors Education or Student Experience for University-level matters
- 3.4 Student representatives should be engaged, where appropriate, in:

- interpreting survey findings
- contributing to the development of enhancement actions

- 3.5 Outcomes of feedback must be communicated to the student cohort in a timely manner.
- 3.6 Detailed requirements for the design, administration and governance of student surveys are set out in Annex 4.

#### **4. Distance Learner Collective Engagement with QA&E – Distance Staff-student liaison committees (D-SSLC)**

##### **4.1 Purpose and reporting**

- 4.1.1 D-SSLCs (asynchronous or synchronous) for distance learner courses are a formal mechanism for distance learner student engagement in QA&E and report to the relevant Boards of Studies.
- 4.1.2 All students must have the opportunity to have their views represented through a D-SSLC.

##### **4.2 Constitution and membership**

- 4.2.1 Each distance learning course must arrange D-SSLCs that are open to all students in the cohort.

##### **Student Representation**

- 4.2.2 Distance learning courses are not required to elect student representatives through The SU processes but must enable a way for all students in a cohort to be able to engage with QA&E processes that impact on their teaching, learning or academic experience. Where a course team decides it would be preferable to recruit student representatives, guidance should be sought from The SU to ensure inclusive recruitment processes are followed.

##### **4.3 Terms of Reference and Functions**

- 4.3.1 D-SSLCs, whether synchronous or asynchronous, must be used to provide a level of influence equivalent to face-to-face engagement, though not necessarily identical in form.
- 4.3.2 Terms of Reference for D-SSLCs to support distance learner student engagement in QA&E must operate within a defined operating framework that ensures consistency, transparency and effectiveness.
- 4.3.3 This includes:
- A clearly defined purpose linked to D-SSLCs
  - Defined moderation and facilitation responsibilities
  - Agreed expectations for participation and response times
  - A structured approach to capturing themes, actions and outcomes (e.g. action trackers)

- Clear routes for escalation of issues into formal governance processes
- Clear routes for outcomes to be communicated to students.

4.3.4 D-SSLCs must:

- Act as a two-way communication channel between students and staff
- Consider monitoring and review documentation
- Comment on programme and unit changes
- Engage with student survey outcomes

4.4 D-SSLC Administration

**Frequency and Form**

4.4.1 A minimum of three formal QA&E engagement points per academic year must be provided. These are referred to as D-SSLCs and may be in the form of:

- Asynchronous consultation periods through online forums;
- Synchronous online ‘town-halls’

**Asynchronous Engagement (Mandatory)**

4.4.2 All distance learning courses must operate a moderated asynchronous engagement space (e.g. Moodle, Engage or MS Teams).

4.4.3 Asynchronous QA&E engagement must:

- Remain open for a minimum of 10 calendar days per engagement cycle
- Include clear prompts and consultation questions
- Allow students to contribute at a time that suits their circumstances
- Be open to all students in the cohort

4.4.4 Asynchronous contributions must:

- Be treated as equivalent to in-meeting contributions
- Count towards quoracy where formal meetings are required

4.4.5 Engagement arrangements, schedules and expectations must be clearly communicated to students at least 5 working days in advance.

**Synchronous Engagement (Optional)**

4.4.6 Where synchronous online meetings are held:

- Meetings should be scheduled to accommodate the maximum number of time zones, normally between 12:00 and 14:00 UK time, or
- Alternative sessions must be provided for different time zones where this is not possible
- All students within a cohort can be invited to attend where there are no elected student representatives

4.4.7 All synchronous meetings must:

- Be recorded

- Allow for asynchronous follow-up contributions
- Not disadvantage students unable to attend live

4.4.8 For programmes with short on-campus residentials, in-person SSLC meetings may take place during these periods in addition to, not instead of, online engagement unless all students in the cohort are required to attend the residential.

## 5. Closing the Feedback Loop

5.1 Programme teams must ensure that:

- Key themes and actions are communicated to student cohorts
- Reasons are provided where action is not possible
- Outcomes are shared in a timely and accessible manner

5.2 Communication methods must reflect the needs of distance learners and use appropriate digital channels.

## 6. Monitoring, Reporting and Oversight

Oversight of D-SSLCs is maintained through a structured reporting, monitoring and assurance framework. Reporting, monitoring and assurance must ensure that distance-learner student engagement with QA&E is effective, inclusive and demonstrably influential in informing decision-making and improvement of the academic experience.

6.1 Reporting

6.1.1 All formal engagement with QA&E must result in documented outputs, including action trackers and, where appropriate, minutes.

6.1.2 Outputs must:

- Clearly identify issues raised, actions agreed and responsible owners
- Be shared with students and relevant stakeholders, including Faculty/School Boards of Studies, the Centre for Learning (CLT) and The Students' Union (The SU)
- Feed into annual QA&E processes

6.1.3 D-SSLCs have a formal line of report to Department/School Learning and Teaching Committees. This reporting requirement is fulfilled by:

- Submission of SSLC action trackers and, where available, minutes for noting
- Student representation to escalate issues arising from SSLCs, and action plan accordingly

6.2 Monitoring

6.2.1 D-SSLCs have a formal line of report to Boards of Studies. This reporting requirement is fulfilled by:

- Annual submission of Terms of Reference
- Submission of D-SSLC action trackers and where available, minutes for noting

6.2.2 The Faculty/School Boards of Studies have responsibility for:

- The operation of Distance Learner SSLCs, including their membership and frequency
- Ensuring that Distance Learner SSLCs provide appropriate coverage across courses
- Collating annual metrics associated with effective delivery of Distance Learner SSLCs
- Confirming that student issues are considered and responded to effectively

6.2.3 Meeting schedules and action trackers are made available to The SU and the CLT to support institutional oversight, as detailed in QA48.

### 6.3 Institutional Assurance

6.3.1 The University maintains a central record of D-SSLC operation to evidence routine engagement across cohorts and support regulatory and quality assurance processes.

6.3.2 Institutional assurance of student engagement is incorporated into a annual reports to Education Quality and Standards Committee (EQSC), Senate, and Council, as set out in QA48.

6.3.3 The Students' Union and the CLT collate emerging themes and key delivery metrics from D-SSLCs. These are used to produce an annual evaluative report, which is submitted to EQSC.

6.3.4 University-level oversight of student engagement across all modes of study is set out in QA48.

## 7. Roles and Responsibilities

### **Faculty/School Boards of Studies**

7.1 Faculty/School Boards of Studies are responsible for:

- Ensuring engagement arrangements remain fit for purpose
- Receiving assurance that student engagement with QA&E on distance learning courses is effective, inclusive and influential
- Considering outputs from engagement mechanisms

### **Directors of Studies**

7.2 Directors of Studies for distance learning courses are responsible for:

- Ensuring engagement processes operate effectively
- Promoting discussion topics through asynchronous forums

- Ensuring sufficient time and clarity for student input
- Closing the feedback loop through published summaries and actions

7.3 Directors of Studies may delegate moderation and administrative tasks but retain overall accountability.

7.4 Course teams are responsible for ensuring that:

- Engagement spaces are appropriately moderated
- Agendas, prompts and consultation questions are clear and accessible
- Records of engagement activity are maintained in a consistent format

#### **Programme Administrators**

7.5 Programme Administrators (or equivalent) are responsible for:

- Supporting engagement processes;
- Maintaining documentation (action trackers/ recording of forum entries); and;
- Ensuring outputs are shared with relevant stakeholders, including Boards of Studies, The SU and the CLT Student Engagement Team.

## **8. Good Practice (Non-mandatory)**

Examples of effective practice in distance learner engagement include:

- Thematic engagement forums linked to survey results
- Structured consultation prompts rather than open-ended discussion
- Targeted engagement aligned to key milestones, such as assessment & feedback, residential periods or research progression points