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*This document is part of the Academic Regulations, Policies and Procedures which govern the University's academic provision. Each document has a unique document number to indicate which section of the series it belongs to.*

## 4J – Guidelines for Online Learning and/or Blended Learning programmes with extensive online learning

### 1. SCOPE AND PURPOSE

- 1.1 These guidelines provide guidance for staff involved in the design, development, delivery and assessment of provision delivered exclusively in online learning mode, or provision delivered in blended mode with extensive online learning content.
- 1.2 An online learning programme is one which is delivered completely online with no attendance or minimal attendance on campus expected, e.g. perhaps only an induction. BU does not currently have an agreed definition of blended learning although most programmes now use electronic resources to some extent within Learning and Teaching strategies. For the purpose of this document, a 'Blended Learning programme with extensive online learning content' is one which relies extensively on online learning for learners to engage with significant sections of the curriculum, e.g. a programme may consist of units which require face-to-face teaching for one/two day(s) within a unit, with substantial and continued teaching in online mode for the remainder of the unit.
- 1.3 The guidelines are intended to prompt thought and discussion on the design of online learning experiences, including overall structure, materials and activities, assessment and feedback and promoting a sense of community in online cohorts. Section 3 is intended to aid staff involved in evaluation panels for the approval of new programmes/periodic review of existing provision or alternatively Faculty Education Committee members where it has been agreed that the proposed changes may be considered by Faculty Education Committee through modification<sup>1</sup>. Sections 3 and 4 are intended to assist staff in the design and development of this type of provision, as well as offer guidance on aspects at a more operational level including management, preparation, delivery, assessment, monitoring and review.
- 1.4 All Bournemouth University programmes must meet the [QAA Quality Code for Higher Education](#) threshold quality and standards as outlined in the BU *Academic Regulations, Policies and Procedures (ARPP)*. These guidelines are designed to complement the *ARPP* series, and relevant policies and procedures are identified throughout this document.

### 2. ACCESSING OTHER RELEVANT BU DOCUMENTS All documents can be accessed [here](#).

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<sup>1</sup> (Updated Nov 2015) *ARPP 4B – Programme and Unit Modifications* states an example of a modification as 'addition of an alternative delivery mode, e.g. to allow an already approved programme to be delivered in online mode or to allow an already approved full-time programme to be delivered in part-time mode.

N.B. with regards to Flexible and Distributed Learning (FDL), where there is a substantial departure from the existing delivery mode or concerns partnership provision, the Faculty should consider this as part of a review and not a modification'.

## 2.2 Other documents with direct relevance to this are:

- 3N - *Enrolment: Procedure*
- 4A - *Programme Approval, Review and Closure: Policy and Procedure*
- 4B - *Programme and Unit Modifications: Policy and Procedure*
- 5A - *Welcome Guide and Programme/Level Handbooks: Procedure*
- 5B - *Student Engagement and Feedback: Policy and Procedure*
- 5C - *Annual Monitoring and Enhancement Review: Policy and Procedure*
- 6N - *External Examining: Policy and Procedure*
- 6C - *Principles of Assessment Design: Policy*
- 6D - *Marking, Independent Marking and Moderation: Policy and Procedure*
- 6E - *Assessment Feedback and Return of Assessed Work: Policy and Procedure*

## Guidelines

### 3. DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Design and development of online learning requires consideration of particular aspects of learning and assessment design, some of which will differ from units and programmes that are predominantly experienced face to face. For example, University processes and models have historically been set up for the more typical campus-based programmes. Also, there are a range of important factors pertinent to an online programme that require specific attention. BU strives to create learning environments in which all students can be fully engaged in their own learning and have equal opportunity to demonstrate their success. This includes online learning environments which need to be welcoming and engaging, whilst maintaining an appropriate level of academic challenge for the learner and capitalising upon the affordances of the wide range of learning technologies that are becoming available. Furthermore, it is important to recognise and promote flexible and effective delivery modes in the increasingly competitive HE environment. This section is written to assist programme teams, evaluation panel members and/or members of Faculty Education Committee at the point of approval/review/modification of predominantly online provision.

#### 3.2 ***Faculty/Partner strategy for online learning developments***

The Faculty/Partner should be clear about its strategy for the development of provision in the online environment. The strategy would need to demonstrate the extent to which the Faculty /Partner already engages in online activity along with its intentions for future developments. In addition to the range of factors covered when developing new provision or revising existing provision, there are further important aspects which require consideration for online development:

- online identity, realistic programme philosophy including brand, and recognition of the suitability of a particular programme/discipline for delivery in this environment;
- intended target market, how to reach the target learner, and additional marketing resource required;
- recognition of the potential costs of unit/programme development and preparation;
- staffing model for ownership of expertise, pedagogy, content and tutoring of units;
- realistic workload models for academic staff developing, tutoring and supporting online learning;
- existing level of staff expertise and confidence in online tutoring;
- staff development for online tutoring and associated pedagogical methods;
- dedicated learning technologist time;
- resource and support for alternative Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) if not using the University's VLE<sup>2</sup>;
- interoperability, accessibility and costs of tools and/or licences used in the design of online activities, study materials and learning objects;

<sup>2</sup> Particularly relevant when considering a Partner programme

- xi) availability, cost and accessibility of digital library resources and support;
- xii) commitment and strategy to ensure necessary revision of learning activities, study materials and support mechanisms throughout the programme approval period.

### 3.3 **Programme team strategy for the programme under consideration**

The programme team will be expected to demonstrate:

- i) their awareness and understanding of the Learning and Teaching environment in which they will be working and be able to articulate their programme philosophy in relation to pedagogy, the use of virtual spaces, the development of units to appeal to varied learning styles and the application of toolsets in supporting the chosen pedagogical approaches and methods, e.g. active learning, constructivist, negotiated, problem or work-based learning. It is expected that teams will demonstrate a clear online pedagogical strategy or blended/extensive online mix rather than a re-working of a strategy previously developed for on-campus provision; and to future proof the work to enable innovation as new tools and technologies become available.
- ii) the communication strategy for and between the programme team, students and other stakeholders;
- iii) the team's strategy for quality assurance of new and existing programme/unit learning activities and study materials, which would include a timetable demonstrating how the whole process is managed and monitored;
  - a) creation and maintenance of programme environment and update of learning activities and study materials;
  - b) signposting/orientation model (how programme coherence is achieved);
  - c) programme activities and materials, including detailed calendar of activities, patterns of delivery and assessment deadlines<sup>3</sup>;
  - d) preparation and refreshment of induction activities and materials;
  - e) preparations for each unit run (including quality assurance arrangements);
  - f) timing and availability of activity briefs and study materials;
  - g) method of approval of units;
  - h) appropriate mechanisms for the management, monitoring and refreshment of any existing online learning content;
  - i) unit tutor allocations/critical friend/peer review/quality assurer;
  - j) External Examiner liaison and training.
- iv) the team's strategy for on-going staff development, sharing of good practice and peer support;
- v) **an understanding of the importance of clear ownership of roles and responsibilities for effective delivery of this type of provision, particularly although not exclusively when the programme is delivered in partnership. The role of the Learning Technologist is critical in leading the pedagogical aspects of design in the online environment and in providing staff development and maximising cohort identity. Additionally an enhanced management/administrator role should be considered to help with tracking the preparation/revision of online content<sup>4</sup>;**
- vi) a deliberate student engagement strategy to maximise student authenticity, academic integrity, performance, support and retention, e.g. synchronous or asynchronous delivery, programme/group membership, interactive learning;
- vii) a strategy for the acquisition of student feedback, including student representation using the wide range of communication technologies now available;
- viii) methods by which students can obtain support from wider professional support services, e.g. careers, additional learning support, and in particular technical advice/IT support;
- ix) liaison with the Library subject team to ensure that appropriate online resources are available, costed and accessible.

### 3.4 **Evaluation Panel or Faculty Education Committee review of learning activities and study materials<sup>5</sup>**

Programme teams will need to provide a sample of the online learning activities that learners will undertake, together with examples of study materials which will be made available for

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<sup>3</sup> Beware of time differences where students are studying from overseas

<sup>4</sup> This whole section is highlighted as this has been recognised by all contributors as extremely important

<sup>5</sup> Currently negotiable dependent on philosophy/style of delivery

learners. This will vary according to the nature of the programme and discipline, but would normally include indicative examples of learning activities and representative samples of study materials for the first term/year of operation. Academic Quality will provide guidance at an early point in the approval/review process on the amount of material the panel will need to see at the evaluation event. This might include a demonstration of the structure of:

- a) induction activities and materials;
- b) a taster unit for use in marketing the programme;
- c) a unit and how learners will engage with it;
- d) an appropriate sample of relevant study materials;
- e) methods of collaborative learning, including group work, discussion forums and shared online activities;
- f) formative and summative assessments and the means by which feedback will be provided by tutors and used by learners;
- g) the programme environment and the way in which a student would experience their programme, including considerations of accessibility for disabled students.

Designing online provision requires some re-thinking of face to face approaches, along with creation of engaging learning activities and effective study materials. Teams are advised to give themselves plenty of time prior to evaluation events to produce the content described above.

#### **4. OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT**

4.1 Online courses run most smoothly if they are prepared well in advance. With sufficient early preparation, all stakeholders are far more likely to reap benefits from the learning experience. Early preparation allows tutors and support staff to concentrate on the building of the programme/unit to best suit the needs of the subject content, BEFORE the curriculum delivery begins.

#### **4.2 *General Management – Programme Level***

Teams will quickly realise that the delivery of an online learning programme is not the same as the delivery of a programme on campus. The functions and processes undertaken for face-to-face programmes are very likely to need some redesign. Section 3 has already identified some key differences. In addition, teams will need to prepare the following:

##### *Library resources*

Many publications are now available electronically, and the number is likely to grow over time. However, not all publishers or providers make their provision accessible online, so it is important for teams to check with Library colleagues regarding the accessibility, and cost, of resources needed for the programme/unit.

##### *Marketing and support for enquirers/applicants*

Teams need to design appropriate marketing materials and communications to attract learners to the programme/unit. Therefore, marketing and follow-up communication needs to be clear and detailed enough to help the enquirer/applicant decide whether, in addition to the subject, the delivery mode and schedule of delivery is what they are looking for. Means of expression used at this stage are important, e.g. if using the words 'flexible' or 'blended' the information needs to adequately explain what is meant by this.

##### *Enrolment*

University standard enrolment processes will most likely need adaptation to allow online learning students to appropriately enrol onto their chosen programme. Please see *3N - Enrolment: Procedure*.

##### *Induction*

As for all programmes, the induction is extremely important, but its importance is magnified for online learning students due to the fact that they may never visit the campus or meet anyone in person. Induction content should therefore include as a minimum, familiarisation with the technologies being used, e.g. the VLE, virtual environments; programme information and

guidance on orientation; a wide range of ground-setting information including setting and exploring expectations; IT skills, academic study skills and Netiquette; information about exceptional circumstances, extensions and academic offences; information for students requiring additional learning support; self-study management and motivation; how to access electronic library resources and support, and confidence building. Even if the induction is largely intended to take place by self-study, an induction still needs facilitation and students need reassurance that they are embarking on a programme that is right for them. In addition, students would benefit greatly if opportunities are available to them throughout the induction to build relationships with other students.

#### *Staff Training and Expectations*

Regardless of staff experience in delivering education in online modes, all team members are likely to benefit from collegiate training and support. This support will be particularly important where tutors are asked to prepare and/or tutor a unit for the first time. It is recommended that the team build a bespoke programme tutor training handbook including information about the general programme philosophy. Each programme is likely to have a set of standardised requirements unique to its own delivery.

In addition to the support available within Faculties, the BU [Fusion Learning, Innovation and Excellence \(FLIE\) website](#) provides a wide range of continuously-updated advice and guidance for colleagues, including the [TEL Toolkit](#). Further resources on [Blended Learning](#) are provided through the FLIE. FLIE is leading on appropriate pedagogical design for online delivery and assessment. Teams involved in designing and developing online provision are strongly recommended to consult these sources for advice on learning and assessment design, incorporating activity into online learning, and many other ideas, hints and tips for effective online learning design.

There are excellent MOOCs (Massive Online Open Courses) available on tutoring and developing digitally capable students.

#### *Communications*

The programme team need to agree a clear communication strategy to manage student expectations. The strategy should include clear identification of channels of communication including roles, responsibilities, main/alternative contact details and appropriate response times. Staff should be aware that online students are reliant upon prompt and effective online communications as they are unable to seek them out in person.

#### *Programme content*

Programme handbooks should be available for students at the start of their programme of study either in paper or electronic format. Alternatively, access to equivalent information may be provided via the VLE. Where this is the case, the information should be presented in an accessible and user-friendly format which is easy for students to navigate. For further information, please see *5A - Welcome Guide and Programme/Level Handbooks: Procedure*.

Online programme content, including induction materials, need to be owned by a member of staff to ensure that this content is updated and refreshed in the same way as unit materials. This ownership may vary from one programme to another.

#### *Assessment*

Assessment will be a major concern for students and therefore it will benefit all parties if expectations around aspects of assessment are made clear upfront. Due to the remote study method, there is more potential for confusion about assessment if the expectations of learners and the systems for submission are not clearly explained. It might be useful to explain the programme assessment strategy, albeit changing some of the terminology used in-house. For instance, explain what is meant by formative assessment, summative assessment, assignments, time constrained papers or alternative forms of assessment. From a practical perspective, students will need to be aware of where and how to submit their assessment work, and may be reassured by a practice run when time is not critical (perhaps within the induction). If the programme is using Turnitin as a plagiarism education or detection tool, a short video explaining how this is being used would be useful.

### **4.3 Unit Preparation**

A member of staff may be asked to:

- create a unit from scratch, i.e. create a new unit specification and associated content;
- create a unit for online delivery where the unit content is already available for on-campus delivery;
- refresh an online unit which has previously been prepared by a different tutor;
- refresh an online unit which they created or have previously delivered.

Each of the above scenarios requires slightly differently consideration. Some pointers are given below:

- remember early preparation is key, set a time schedule for preparation of the unit;
- if refreshing material, where is the latest version of the unit, is it located in the unit area you will be delivering from, is it visible to students already or is the unit hidden?;
- when are the students expecting to study the unit, and over what time period?;
- when and how will the content be released to students? Remote online learners tend to work at different paces to suit their own needs and may require more flexibility than on-campus students. The programme philosophy/structure may be a useful guide with this;
- who are the students, e.g. international, full-time, part-time, mature, unique provision for a specific company?;
- are there any PSRB considerations?;
- is this an early unit on the programme or have the students already experienced online study? If this is the first unit students have undertaken they will be less familiar with the layout of materials and may need more direction.
- what units have the students been doing just before this unit and is the assessment complete? (where units overlap students may join the online unit late and may need reminding that a new unit is starting);
- what pedagogical methods will be employed within the unit and what needs to be set up in the supporting technologies? e.g. learning activities, subject materials and resources, recorded lectures, interactive tools and activities, online testing.
- when reviewing the unit reading list and any other learning resources referred to in the unit materials, check whether these are available electronically. Print materials may be digitised within the limits of BU's Copyright Licencing Agreement and made available via the unit reading list. If unsure, refer to the Library subject team; Talis-Aspire reading lists are acknowledged as best practice
- assessment papers will need preparation in the normal way

#### 4.4 **Tutoring a Unit**

- i) Students will need to be clear about when to expect instruction or guidance, or response to their posted queries. It is recommended that tutors use a 'welcome message' at the start of the unit advising students of the days/times they might expect tutor interaction. A general programme standard may help in this respect, e.g. the team may have decided that all tutors should visit their unit at least 3 times a week. Regular announcements, without overloading students, are recommended. Tutors might consider setting time aside in their own calendar to ensure regular visits to the unit;
- ii) Within the introduction to the unit, tutors should ensure there is a schedule detailing the timings of the unit, how students will learn while studying the unit and assessment requirements throughout (this might be similar to a unit guide given to on-campus students);
- iii) Monitor student engagement (see section 4.5 below);
- iv) Be careful about changes to unit content once this unit has commenced as students may have read or printed off materials already available to them;
- v) Communicate with other members of the programme team.

#### 4.5 **Student Engagement**

The programme team should work to the general principles outlined in *5B - Student Engagement and Feedback: Policy and Procedure*.

Encouraging student participation is key in the design of online learning. It is important to include as much activity in their learning as possible, as courses which are predominantly materials-led tend to result in lower participation rates. Learning technologies such as VLEs, communication and networking services, and virtual online environments, enable students to learn actively online by carrying out actions and interactions with the technologies, and with their colleagues on the unit or programme. Of course, students need to read, but they are able to do so much more with current learning technologies. However, even when interactive methods are used in online provision, some students may not engage as fully as we may like. If a unit tutor is concerned about a student's engagement with a particular unit, this should be reported to the Programme Support Officer who will follow this up with the student(s) concerned. The analytical tools available in VLEs and other learning technologies can give tutors a good sense of how students are engaging with their learning, and Learning Technologists will be able to advise on the tools available to support this function, and on how to interpret the resulting data.

BU's reading list software enables academics to monitor student views of items listed on the unit reading list. Your library subject team can advise further on how to use this.

#### 4.6 **Assessment**

- i) The requirements for the quality and standards of assessment within online learning provision are exactly the same as those for all BU programmes. Please see *6C – Principles of Assessment Design: Policy*, *6D - Marking, Independent Marking and Moderation: Policy and Procedure* and *6E - Assessment Feedback and Return of Assessed Work: Policy and Procedure*.
- ii) Students will most likely be submitting written work and other files through the VLE and will need to be clear how they should undertake this. As noted in section 4.2 this is an important consideration and students will need to be confident about this and aware of the consequences of late/failed submission.
- iii) Programme teams should ensure that students are informed when marks and feedback are available including details on how to access this information. It is recommended that programme members employ a common method to relay this information to students.
- iv) Care should be taken to ensure the accuracy of transfer of marks from Excel mark sheets, the VLE and the Student Records System whilst these systems continue to operate independently. In addition, evidence of marking, second-marking, and provision of samples for External Examiners should be carefully actioned and monitored in the online environment as this presents some additional challenges, e.g. accessibility of materials, locating the chosen samples, recording approved marks and evidencing the quality assurance process taking place. Further information relating to the moderation of online assessments is included in *6B - External Examining: Policy and Procedure*.

#### 4.7 **Monitoring and Review**

Annual monitoring and review should occur in the normal way as outlined in *5C - Annual Monitoring and Enhancement Review: Policy and Procedure*.

## **General**

### **5. REFERENCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION**

- 5.1 BU Quality Assurance Framework Review Group, Flexible and Distributed Learning (FDL) Working Group – Paper April 2008
- 5.2 Exploration of the role of administration with regard to 'e', 2008
- 5.3 Unit Tutor Guide – to assist with the preparation and delivery of online units, BA (Hons) International Business and Management, 2011

5.4 Selected academic references: Please talk to FLIE staff for further information

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Creating blended learning content:

Published online: <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/creating-blended-learning-content>

5.5 This policy was reviewed according to the University's [Equality Analysis Procedure](#) in January 2018.