FLEXIBLE AND DISTRIBUTED LEARNING POLICY

Incorporating technology-enhanced learning

Contents

Note: For other University policies and procedures (which are shown in italics) please see the Policies page on the main University website (http://bucks.ac.uk/about-us/governance-and-policies/policies).

This document has been designed to be accessible for readers. However, should you require the document in an alternative format please contact the Academic Registry.

Background

1   It is expected that all programmes incorporate some aspects of technology and may therefore fit within the QAA's definition for *technology-enhanced learning*: 'learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology'. However, there is a specific requirement for guidance for programmes that are entirely or predominantly delivered using the University's VLE or other virtual platform. The need for the policy became apparent following an institutional audit, and is reflective of the sector's response to developments of technology and changes in practice, and the growing student expectation of high quality, accessible and interactive delivery using technology.[1]

Purpose Statement

2   The policy provides standardised guidance for definitions and practice relating to the delivery of technology-enhanced (TEL) and flexible and distance learning (FDL) in all programmes, drawing on the guidance of the QAA and Jisc where relevant.

Applicability and Scope

3   This policy applies to all taught academic qualifications including foundation, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, irrespective of funding source or the accrediting body. It includes the delivery of work-based learning and apprenticeship programmes. It has particular relevance to the following: flexible and distributed, distance qualifications and apprenticeships.

Definitions*

*From Quality Assurance Agency's online glossary and Jisc

Digital capability: the skills needed to thrive in a digital environment. Refer to Jisc's Digital Capabilities Framework for details.

Distance learning: A course of study that does not involve face-to-face contact between students and tutors but instead uses technology such as the internet, intranets, broadcast media, CD-ROM and video, or traditional methods of correspondence - learning 'at a distance'.

E-learning: See technology-enhanced or enabled learning.

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[1] Mirriahi, N., & Alonzo, D. (2015). Shedding Light on Students ' Technology Preferences : Implications for Academic Development Shedding Light on Students ' Technology Preferences : Implications for. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, *12*(1), 1–14.

National Union of Students. (2012). Student Experience Research 2012. Part 1: Teaching and Learning. Student experience research to gain insight into the quality of the learning experience.

Flexible and distributed learning: A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations. See also distance learning.

Technology-enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning): Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

Key principles

4   The University must provide resources, investment systems, support and opportunities to develop the digital capability of students and staff.

5   The University has a formal responsibility to ensure that academic standards with respect to awards and qualifications are maintained.

6   Flexible, distributed and technology-enhanced learning should widen learning opportunities without prejudice either to the academic standard of the award being sought or the quality of what is offered to students. Furthermore, the arrangements for assuring quality and standards should be appropriate to the primary mode of delivery, but equally rigorous, secure and open to scrutiny.

Academic Standards

7   The development and delivery of programmes is detailed in the *Approval of Academic Provision* procedure.

8   All materials produced by a member of university staff or someone acting on behalf of the university are subject to internal branding guidance and relevant copyright law.

9   Programmes that are FDL by definition must have differentiation where appropriate in the following procedures and processes, including but not limited to:

   a   New programme proposal
   b   Validation (e.g. though the provision of sample resources)
   c   Mitigating circumstances or extensions
   d   Workload planning
   e   Enrolment
   f   Selection and recruitment (including expectations and access to resources if these are different to those available to on-campus students)
   g   Learner support (see Learner Support for FDL)

Programme delivery

10   For the quality of TEL materials, the University will take note of the relevant national and international benchmarks, and best practice regarding material design, content, delivery and quality, and will comply with these where appropriate. Guidance or direction on resources may be in the first instance sought from in-house learning technologists.

11   The University will conform to current UK legislation regarding accessibility of TEL materials in accordance with over-riding obligations specified in the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 and Equality Act 2010.

12   The University's Disability Service will provide guidance on appropriate arrangements designed to address the specific needs of individual students on FDL programmes.

Delivery systems

13   The University will take all practicable steps regarding the security of its staff and students using the University's virtual learning environment through its *Information Security Policy*.

14   In order to mitigate risk where staff choose to use outside platforms or social media to deliver elements of programmes, guidance must be sought from the *Information Security Policy*, *Data Protection Policy* and the *Social Media Policy*.

15   The University will make every effort to ensure that virtual delivery systems for all programmes are reliable and fit for purpose, and that a contingency plan is available in the event of short-term failure of the designated modes of delivery.

Learner support for FDL

16   The University must be clear in specifying its responsibilities in terms of assuring the quality of programme delivery and learner support. Students must have an identified contact provided, who from the outset of study can provide constructive feedback on academic performance and authoritative guidance on academic progression.

17   New learners should be provided with introductory training materials and support for working in an e-learning environment so that equipment and technical access can be tested and facilitated (e.g. password expiry info).

18   Procedures must be in place to ensure student representation within FDL cohorts.

19   Academic, technical, and mentor support for learners on FDL programmes should be facilitated online through email or web-based conferencing.

20   Students must be made aware of the opportunities/resources available to support their learning. This should include clear, up-to-date information on the learning support available locally and remotely, and the frequency of availability of support and anticipated response times.

21   The resources available to students, including Library services, should offer parity in terms of service through the provision of accessible services and in cases where this is not possible, the differences should be made clear to the students.

22   Students must be made aware of their own responsibilities in terms of responding to requests for information, and for participation in individual or group activities that facilitate learning. Guidelines for communicating with other students and tutors must be clarified ('netiquette').

23   Where possible and appropriate, collaborative learning opportunities, such as peer discussion activities, should be provided as they offer a strong dimension of student support. However, the inclusion of such activities in the programme of study should be determined by the nature of the programme and its intended aims and outcomes. A rationale for their exclusion would be expected as part of the validation process.

24   Students must be provided with regular, formal opportunities to provide feedback on their experience of the FDL programme. Methods may include online surveys and the use of web-conferencing tools. The course lead has responsibility for ensuring the methods used are fit for purpose and address any questions of anonymity. The University must take responsibility for processing and acting upon feedback, and ensuring that students are informed of any action taken as a result of their feedback.