Policy and Code of Practice for Flexible and Distributed Learning (including e-learning)

University of Strathclyde Glasgow

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION

I. The policy and procedures outlined here align with Section 2 of the QAA *Code of Practice on Collaborative Provision and Flexible and Distributed Learning (FDL)*. They are concerned with educational provision leading to an award, or to specific credit toward an award of the University delivered, supported and/or assessed through means which do not generally require the student to attend particular classes or events at particular times and particular locations.

II. Proposals for courses delivered wholly or partly through FDL should be progressed through the **University Procedure and Guidelines on Course and Class Approval**. Any existing courses where an element of FDL is proposed should follow the normal procedures for amendments to courses and classes.

III. Where *delivery of a course or class by FDL* involves collaboration with a partner the **Policy and Code of Practice for Collaborative Provision Leading to Awards or Joint Awards of the University** should be followed.

IV. The University of Strathclyde retains sole authority for the award of certificates and transcripts relating to its courses delivered through flexible and distributed learning arrangements.

V. The following additional considerations must be taken into account when designing courses or classes to be delivered by flexible or distributed learning routes.

2. LIAISON WITH PROFESSIONAL AND STATUTORY BODIES (PSB)

i. Departments and Faculties should inform any professional, statutory or regulatory body which has approved, recognised or accredited a course for which significant Flexible and Distributed Learning (FDL) arrangements are developed after the course has been approved, recognised or accredited. The status of the course in respect of PSB accreditation must be made clear to prospective students.

3. FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

ii. FDL arrangements must be fully costed (including overheads) and accounted for accurately and fully, and should be of clear benefit to the University. A business case should be prepared including a risk matrix and adequate safeguards should be in place against financial or other irregularities which might compromise academic standards or the quality of learning opportunities.

4. DELIVERY

i. Documentation available to the student in advance of their programme of study should clearly set out

    i) full details of the programme of study and of the units or modules which make up that programme and the relationships between them;

    ii) the intended learning outcomes and teaching, learning and assessment methods of each unit or module;

    iii) a schedule for delivery of study materials; and

    iv) a schedule of deadlines for formative and summative assessment.

ii. This information should be made available in a variety of formats.

iii. Delivery systems should be fit for purpose, be secure and reliable and have an appropriate availability and life expectancy. They must be fully tested before their operational launch. Delivery systems must include a means of confirming receipt by the student.

iv. A risk assessment and contingency plans for delivery in the event of the failure of the main delivery system must be in place.

v. Quality assurance arrangements for flexible and distributed learning must be at least as rigorous as those for the University's internal provision. As far as possible they should accord with the Policies, and Procedures and Guidelines for learning, teaching and assessment as approved by Senate. It is expected that all such provision will be reviewed at least every three years.

5. LEARNER SUPPORT

i. Departments must ensure that students on flexible and distributed learning courses receive adequate induction and preparation. This should include the guidance for students on good academic practice and the avoidance of plagiarism and a statement explaining the University's position on academic dishonesty. Students should be asked to confirm acceptance of the terms of the statement.

ii. Where provision is delivered in an e-learning environment, Departments should ensure that students receive adequate training in the skills needed to access materials and that they have access to competent technical support, whether locally or remotely.

iii. Students should be fully informed at the beginning of their studies about the availability of academic, technical and pastoral support, including on-line support and opportunities for face-to-face meetings, and the anticipated response times to requests for information or help. Students should be made aware of what support is available to them, in terms for example of academic advice, library and IT support and careers guidance. Students should also be informed of what is provided by the University and what is made available through the support provider. Students must be made aware of the University's appeals, complaints and disciplinary procedures as these apply to them.

iv. The expectations on students in terms of the nature and extent of autonomous, collaborative and supported aspects of learning, including their expected time commitment and responsibilities as learners in terms of responding to requests for information and participating in individual or group activities, should be clearly explained to prospective students. Expectations in terms of required or optional attendance at residential classes or field trips should be fully explained at the beginning of the course.

v. Students should have a named contact who can give them authoritative guidance on the progress of their studies and constructive feedback on academic performance. Students should also have regular opportunities for discussions with other learners. The rules and protocols for communication with other students and tutors should be clearly laid out at the start of the course.

vi. Like full-time students of the University, students on flexible and distributed learning programmes should have regular opportunities to give feedback on the course and their learning experience. Where the course or unit is supported by an external provider, responsibility for processing feedback from students should be clearly

identified as should the responsibility for informing students about the outcome of their feedback. All students should be encouraged to contact telluswhatyouthink@strath.ac.uk if they have any issues they wish to raise with the University.

6. SUPPORT CONTRACTS FOR THE PROVISION OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND/OR ACADEMIC SERVICES TO SUPPORT OFF-CAMPUS PROGRAMMES

i. The University sometimes enters into contract with institutions and agencies to supply administrative and/or academic services to support the University's off-campus programmes.

ii. Support contracts for the University's off-campus learning programmes are normally concerned primarily with recruitment of students, administration and provision of facilities. They may also include minor roles, under the supervision of University staff, in connection with the use of local tutors or counsellors and in providing advice to students on the conduct and progress of their studies.

iii. Any arrangement with another institution/agency for the supply of administrative and/or academic services to support the University's off-campus programmes must be formalised in writing, approved by Senate and signed by the Principal (or nominee) and the responsible person in the collaborating agency. Such arrangements are normally recognised through a *Service Support Agreement* along the lines set down in the template at https://moss.strath.ac.uk/internationalisation/Pages/InternationalPartnerships.aspx and are subject to review at least every three years.

7. ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS

i. Students should receive early notification of the methods, criteria and regulations for assessment, including the relative weighting of elements of the course where appropriate.

ii. Adequate opportunities for timely formative assessment and appropriate feedback must be provided to students on flexible and distributed learning programmes.

iii. The Department must ensure that there are secure and reliable means of transferring students' work for assessment and that there is a means of proving or confirming both that the work is properly attributed to the student who produced it and that it has been safely received within any deadline. Students must have clear instructions on the format and security measures they should adopt when forwarding work electronically or by mail, including the advisability of keeping a copy.

iv. As with full-time students, every effort must be made to ensure that the work is the students' own original work. Departments are encouraged to make use of appropriate plagiarism detection software, such as Turnitin. Students must be informed that the software is being used and given details of the Department's policy in this regard.

8. EXAMINATIONS OUTWITH THE CAMPUS

i. In exceptional cases, a student who is based on the Strathclyde campus may be allowed to take an examination off campus with the approval of the Head of Department and the Head of Student Experience.

ii. On receipt of a request by a student to take an examination outwith the University, the Head of Department should consider the exceptional case put forward by the student to warrant permission to take the examination outwith the University. For international students, the practice within the University has increasingly been to accept that students who have left the UK to return to their home country, and who would incur major costs if they had to travel to the UK for the resit of the exam only (and/or who might have problems in obtaining a visa in time for the resit), can be permitted to take the examination in their home country. Other exceptional circumstances which could be taken into account in deciding whether to permit a student to take an examination outwith the University might be personal illness, illness in the immediate family or the death of a close family member.

iii. If the Head of Department is satisfied that a robust case can be made to permit the student to take an examination outwith the University, a number of operational requirements have to be fulfilled to ensure compliance with the University's quality assurance procedures and equity in treatment for all students:

i) An appropriate venue for the exam needs to be identified; typically either at a local University or British Council office.

ii) Appropriate invigilation must be organised as for similar examinations held in the UK. Invigilation must be independent, i.e. friends or family cannot carry out invigilation.

iii) The examination must take place at exactly the same time as the UK equivalent even where this means that the student must sit the examination late at night or early in the morning.

iv) Arrangements must be in place for the safe and confidential transportation and storage of the examination paper and examination script.

v) The candidate must bear any necessary costs associated with taking the examination outwith the University of Strathclyde (such as transportation of the script and costs associated with invigilation).

iv. Once the request has been assessed and the formal approval of the Head of Department obtained, the necessary arrangements may be made. The formal request should then be forwarded to the Head of Student Experience.

v. These arrangements do not require a formal service support contract.