

Distance Learning Policy

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UNIVERSITY OF
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<p>Summary:</p> <p>This document defines the minimum requirements for delivering distance and/or flexible and blended learning for all programmes offered by the University and its Collaborative Partners.</p> <p>Appendix 1 is updated annually by ITS staff and approved by ARPP</p>	

SUMMARY OF CHANGES

This list summarises the changes since 2016/17. The date confirms when the changes were implemented.

Implementation date	Changes Approved by Senate
May 2020	<p>Section 2: Revised definition: References to Distance learning “incorporating” FBL are removed as these create a circular definition and render any meaningful definition of blended learning within the wider curriculum obsolete.</p> <p>Section 3.1: More realistic claims made about the comparability of DL and campus-based learning</p> <p>Section 3.3: Updated to reflect new online module evaluation process</p> <p>Section 3.4.2: Additional point emphasising importance of full economic costing and provision for additional workload implications when proposing new DL courses</p> <p>Section 3.4.2: Final point adapted to make provision for the reliability of assessment more realistic and meaningful</p> <p>Section 3.4.5: New section number added to statement about PGR students and the text adapted to clarify that PGR students are not normally defined as distance learners.</p> <p>Section 4.1: Commentary on requirements of “study at a distance” removed as this falls outside the scope of distance learning and this policy.</p> <p>Section 4.1: Section for “PGR student only” indented, to emphasise that this is not really part of this policy.</p> <p>Section A1: Software requirements: guidance on browser compatibility updated.</p>

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Policy covers educational provision leading to an award or part of an award which is delivered, supported and/or assessed through means which generally do not require the student to attend particular classes or events at scheduled times. Definitions are provided in Section 2.

The Policy outlines the minimum requirements that the University expects to be met by Programmes and Collaborative Partners when delivering provision as defined in Section 2. The requirements of this Policy should be read in conjunction with the online Quality and Standards Handbook and all other relevant University regulations, policies and guidelines. In particular, attention is drawn to the *Work Based and Placement Learning – Approved Procedures*.

This Policy, informed by good practice and the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, is designed to safeguard and enhance the student experience.

2. DEFINITIONS

The term Distance Learning (DL) can be applied in situations where it is possible for a student to achieve all the outcomes and satisfy all the requirements of a programme, course or module without attending the university. It would not apply in situations where teaching staff travel to a remote location to deliver a course and in DL contexts students and teachers/tutors are always in physically separate places. Access to the teacher or supervisor and other learners is usually enabled through the use of technology. The interaction between the student and teacher or supervisor may be synchronous (in real time) or asynchronous (with a time delay) or a mixture of both. Distance learning may also be paper-based, in which case the interaction will be asynchronous.

Flexible and blended learning (FBL) combines aspects of Distance Learning and synchronous educational practices and may involve a student spending a significant period of their studies away from the University undertaking a project, fieldwork or research either independently or under the auspices of another approved organisation, which may be based elsewhere in the UK or overseas.

3. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT OF DL PROGRAMMES AND PROVISION

3.1 General principle

Guiding the quality assurance and enhancement requirements of DL programmes is the general principle that students studying part, or all, of their programme by DL have an experience which is, wherever practicable and possible, comparable with other campus-based students, supported by a shared understanding of the expectations and responsibilities of all parties involved.

3.2 Approval of DL provision

A taught programme or module, delivered by DL, is expected to be of equal quality to any other programme or module leading to a University award and, as part of the validation process, it must demonstrate that it shall meet students' needs effectively.

Programmes and modules, which are delivered by DL, are validated in the same way as any other programme or module. In addition, the following key questions shall need consideration by the programme team and supported by adequate documentation:

- a) the management of the learning experience;

- b) relevance, life expectancy, security and reliability of the learning platform and software applications;¹
- c) staff skills and training;
- d) student support arrangements; and
- e) contingency plans in case of technological failure or inability to access the online platforms, due to trade embargoes in the country in which the student is based (to be discussed with appropriate University staff)

Programmes not delivered by DL that wish to develop this mode of delivery shall be required to undergo an Interim Validation. Details can be found in the online Quality and Standards Handbook.

3.3 Student engagement and Annual Monitoring

Where DL occurs as part of a programme that is credit bearing it shall be subject to the University's Annual Monitoring and Module and/or Programmatic Evaluation processes. Where this applies, Programmatic/Module evaluations shall use the standard Module Evaluation question set, but may adapt the wording of questions where this enhances their relevance and should pose an additional question about the experiences of studying remotely. DL programmes shall normally conduct Programme Committee Meetings electronically and seek ways to ensure meaningful student representation and participation.

Where an issue arises relating to the DL arrangements, this should be brought to the attention of staff and students concerned immediately and attempts to resolve the problem should be put in place at the earliest opportunity. If the issue cannot be resolved and the University deems that the student is unable to proceed with their studies as a result of this, the student(s) may be required to withdraw or transfer to another mode of delivery and/or programme.

3.4 Expectations on the University, its staff, and its students

Learning is a partnership between staff across the University and individual students. There is a shared set of expectations between staff and students, which the University has encapsulated in the *Student Charter*. Specifically in relation to DL:

3.4.1 Programmes shall ensure that students are provided with:

- a) a delivery system of the programme or module that is secure, reliable, fit for its purpose, and has an appropriate availability and life expectancy;
- b) study materials that meet the expectations of the University in respect of the quality of teaching and learning-support material for a programme or module leading to one of its awards;
- c) an appropriate contingency plan, which would come into operation in the event of failure of the designed mode of delivery;
- d) from the outset of the student's study, at least one identified contact, either local or remote through email, telephone and post, who can give constructive feedback on academic performance;
- e) information about when and how they may contact staff, a clear schedule for the delivery of their study materials and for assessment of their work;
- f) a clear and realistic explanation of the expectations placed upon them for study of the programme or module, and for the nature and extent of autonomous, collaborative and

¹ Where delivery will require additional IT resources beyond the current IT learning platform and/or software applications, programmes must include a proposal for the purchase, licence and support in the Academic Resources Form.

supported aspects of learning plus details of the minimum technical requirements for the computer facilities required to access the online facilities;

- g) information about the Library Services, detailed on the University's Intranet > Information Bank > Library resources pages;
- h) where appropriate, regular opportunities for inter-learner discussions about the programme, both to facilitate collaborative learning and to provide a basis for facilitating their participation in the quality assurance and enhancement of the programme;
- i) appropriate opportunities to give formal feedback on their experience of the programme;
- j) access to all academic regulations and policies, including the *Distance Learning Policy*.

3.4.2 The University or Collaborative Partner shall ensure that:

- a) staff who provide support to learners on their programmes have appropriate skills, and opportunities to receive appropriate training and development;
- b) relevant costs (FEC) for the proposed model of DL, including workload implications for staff involved are assessed at the New Programme Proposal stage and resources are allocated accordingly.
- c) the Programme Handbook (for taught programmes) or PGR Students' Handbook and PGR Supervisors' Handbook (for postgraduate research programmes) details how the learner support that would normally be provided on site shall be delivered off-site (e.g. Student Services, personal tutor and library resources);
- d) support for learners, when normally provided by Student Services, is made available remotely wherever possible and practicable;
- e) the identity of applicants for distance learning courses are verified robustly and that staff receive the guidance, training and tools that promote reliable approaches to assessment and assist in the identification of contract cheating, plagiarism and related forms of academic misconduct.

3.4.3 Information Technology Services, * who have responsibility for software for which it holds the licenses, shall ensure that:

- a) the reliability of the delivery system within its remit is tested, and that contingency plans would come into operation in the event of the system/network failing;
- b) they provide support as a minimum within normal working hours (currently Monday-Friday, 9-5).

* *Where the Academic Resources Form has confirmed that the delivery system will not be supported by ITS, the Programme shall be required to assume responsibility for the above.*

3.4.4 Students shall ensure that:

- a) they have regular and reliable access to the internet with appropriate firewall protection and a computer that meets the minimum technical requirements set by the programme;
- b) they make their own arrangements for IT support to resolve technical failures relating to their Internet Service Provider, firewall protection and their computer hardware and software as the University can only answer queries or provide support for University-owned equipment;
- c) they ensure that they understand the basic terms and descriptions used in computing so that they can follow instructions about how to use their computer to study and communicate;
- d) they engage with the learning materials and mode of delivery;
- e) they conform to the schedule for the programme delivery and assessment, monitor the receipt of materials and alert the University if materials are corrupted or fail to arrive;
- f) they take responsibility for developing their IT skills, where appropriate;

- g) they regularly check their Unimail accounts to which essential information may be sent by the University.

3.4.5 Postgraduate research (PGR) students are not normally considered distance learners, unless enrolled on this basis and are required to attend the University in person for:

- a) Induction
- b) MPhil to PhD Upgrade Viva or Progression to Thesis Viva for Professional Doctorate students
- c) Viva Voce at the end of their research study.

Failure to attend specific learning and/or assessments deemed as mandatory may result in failure and students may be required to withdraw from the programme.

4. ADMISSION, ENROLMENT AND INDUCTION

4.1 Admission requirements

To qualify for consideration for admission to a DL programme or module applicants shall meet the normal entry requirements of the programme.

In addition, some programmes may require that applicants:

- a) have reliable access to the appropriate technology to enable them to engage with the DL material;
- b) accept the supervisory arrangements required by the University, which may include having a local supervisor/academic adviser when studying away from University;
- c) provide evidence of access to the appropriate library, computing and other academic facilities required, e.g. letters from relevant libraries;
- d) provide evidence that they have sufficient funds available to meet the costs of the programme including travel to and from the UK and accommodation costs for attendance at the University relating to, where required, interview, induction, learning, assessment, viva voce examinations,

Where additional **requirements** for admission are operated by a programme this must be clearly defined in public-facing literature about the programme.

Applicants shall submit an application in the standard way for the programme.

Where an interview is required for entry, the University or Collaborative Partner may require the applicant to come to Winchester or the Collaborative Partner's base, with video-conferencing/Skype being the preferred option for those who cannot attend a physical interview.

Where additional computer hardware and/software is required, a formal offer of a place may not be issued until University is satisfied that the appropriate equipment is in place.

Taught Programmes (in conjunction with Student Recruitment & Admissions) and Research Degrees Quality Committee shall ensure that all offer letters shall include or be accompanied by supplementary information confirming requirements regarding attendance, fees, induction and any special arrangements pertaining to the programme (e.g. research skills assessment for Postgraduate Research Programmes). Applicants should ensure that they have fully understood the terms and conditions prior to accepting an offer. The offer letter shall direct students to 'IT Skills required for Distance Learning' (Appendix 2).

PGR students only:

Most PGR students are likely to be studying at a distance from the University for some part of their registration period, whether or not they are formally registered as a Distance Learning Student. Supervision sessions can be conducted using email, Skype and other forms of technology.

At interview the following matters concerning the student's learning environment will be assessed:

- a) Students must have regular and reliable access to the internet and a computer that meets any technical requirements of their project;
- b) Students must make their own arrangements for IT support;
- c) Students must make their own arrangements for library access and data gathering.

4.2 Enrolment

Enrolment and re-enrolment shall be conducted by post and/or online for Distance Learning programmes, as required by the Academic Registrar. Registry shall provide bespoke letters for DL students.

4.3 Induction

Induction may be conducted online or students may be required to attend a formal induction at Winchester. DL students are guided to online resources that induct students into distance learning. These resources are provided by the University and monitored by the Distance and Blended Learning Advisory Group.

PGR students (with the exception of Professional Doctorate students whose induction may be conveyed online) must attend an Induction at the University.

5. COSTS AND TUITION FEES

Tuition fees are set annually. For details, please refer to the University website.

Where programmes require students to attend interview, specific learning and/or assessments (including viva voces) at the University, students shall bear all costs of travel to University, a Student Visitor visa (if required), accommodation and other associated costs.

APPENDIX 1 PERSONAL COMPUTING REQUIREMENTS

Note – these requirements are reviewed annually by ITS and the Head of Technology Enhanced Learning. They were last updated in May 2017. Any currently enrolled student who has concerns should contact their Programme Leader in the first instance.

Computer Hardware Requirements

Any computer or mobile device purchased within the last 5 years should be sufficient. If in doubt, or for older devices, the following minimum specifications will ensure that a workstation performs to a reasonable standard:

Operating System	Windows 7, 8.1 or 10	Mac OS X 10.7.x ²
Processor	2 gigahertz (GHz) or faster	2 gigahertz (GHz) or faster
Memory (RAM)	4GB	4GB
Hard Disk ³	250GB	250GB
Optical Drive (DVD/CD-ROM or Writer) ⁴	Optional	Optional
Sound ⁵	Yes	Yes

Computer Hardware Explained a)

Processor

This is the main component which will determine the speed of the computer. Intel processors are currently labeled Core i3, i5 and i7 with the latter being the most powerful and most expensive. Other brands such as AMD have equivalent models.

b) Memory (RAM)

This component is also very important to the overall performance of a PC. RAM stores files related to the operating system and programs which are running while the computer is turned on. Every program requires a certain amount of memory to run, so if too many programs or large files are run at the same time, the computer may run out of memory and begin running very slowly.

c) Hard Disk

Hard disk is the permanent means of storage and is where all the files such as Docs, Music, Pictures and the Operating System files are stored. It is important to have enough hard disk space to serve your storage needs. If a hard disk becomes very full it can negatively impact the overall computer performance.

For further advice on specification when purchasing a new computer, seek guidance from your preferred reseller.

d) Screen

When buying a new computer a screen size of at least 17" is recommended but sizes these days are routinely far larger and in wide screen format. Screen size for mobile devices such as laptops and

² Latest version may be required for some software

³ Considerably more disk space will be needed to store large amounts of personal files

⁴ May be required to install additional software if supplied on DVD/CD-ROM and can be an externally attachable one, e.g. USB

⁵ Required if the programme requires media which has sound. Most modern computers and mobile devices have integrated sound

tablets will generally be smaller than 17" but should be selected at a sufficient size for comfortable use.

e) Printer

There are currently no printer specific requirements for Distance Learning programmes.

Mobile Devices and Tablets

This heading covers the increasingly popular Smart Phone and Tablet devices such as the iPhone/iPad, Android , or Windows-based phone/tablet devices. Most of the University online systems work on these mobile devices. However we do not guarantee that all systems will be problem free. There is also a dedicated and fully supported University app available, UoW mobile app, which contains useful information and services and is available on Apple App Store, Google Play as well as a browser based version.

Workstation Health & Safety

From a health and safety point of view, staff and students are advised to use a conventional workstation for long periods of study rather than laptops and mobile communication devices. As these more portable devices have become more popular there has been a corresponding increase in the number of people suffering from upper limb disorders and back problems. Please refer to the Health & Safety pages on the Intranet of Setup Help Guides and Workstation Exercises.

Computer Software requirements a)

Operating System

Microsoft Windows 7, 8.1 or 10, or Mac OS X 10.7 onwards are recommended and supported by our services. We are unable to support Linux or other less mainstream operating systems.

b) Other Software

The following software will be required for distance learning:

- i) Microsoft Word or an equivalent word processor which can save documents in the format .doc or .docx.
- ii) Other Microsoft Office products such as Excel or PowerPoint may be required by some courses. Microsoft Office (including Word) is available as a free download for all students via portal.office.com.
- iii) Access to an email service – the Unimail email system is provided by the University through the Microsoft Office 365 service.
- iv) A supported web browser – Apple Safari, Chrome and Firefox are recommended. Microsoft Internet Explorer (version 11 or above) is supported, but issues have been reported and it is not recommended.
- v) Free downloads such as Adobe Reader may be required to open online material vi) A form of Malware/Virus Protection vii) Adobe Flash Player

From time to time Microsoft offer deals to University staff and students. Details of any currently available deals will be posted on the Intranet by ITS.

Internet Connection

Distance learning programmes all require extensive access to online resources. As such, a broadband connection of at least 1Mbps is recommended. Higher speed services would be advantageous due to the reduced load times for online resources. A dial up connection is not recommended.

Electronic submissions for assessment

These should be word-processed documents in Microsoft Word format (either .doc or .docx). Students can submit assignments prepared using a Mac, running their preferred word processor and a standard web browser, as long as they submit work in one of these formats.

Computer Security and Disaster Recovery

Keeping the PC secure and ensuring coursework can be recovered in the event of a disaster is extremely important.

Computer and printer failure cannot be used as a reason to be granted an extended deadline for an assignment.

To try and ensure the PC is kept as secure as possible staff and students should: a)

Use strong virus protection:

- i) Microsoft offer Security Essentials for Windows 7, which is free for home use, if there is no other protection in place. Windows 8 and 10 come with Windows Defender already installed but you may wish to choose a different solution for your protection.
 - ii) Ensure the virus protection is kept up to date iii) Run scans for viruses at least once per month
- b) Use strong passwords:
- i) Use numbers
 - ii) Upper and lower case letters iii) Do not use common words or names
 - iv) Do not use the same password for everything
- c) Be aware when using the computer that most threats can be eliminated by taking the following precautions:
- i) Take care what links you click on in emails and online ii) Be careful what email attachments you open iii) Be careful where you browse on the internet
 - iv) Be careful what you say yes to when a dialogue box appears
 - v) McAfee SiteAdvisor is a free download which can help you to determine where it is safe to browse
- d) Make sure the operating system and software is kept up to date using services such as Windows Update
- e) Use a Firewall: Windows has a firewall built in which is more than adequate in most cases.

It is very important that work can be recovered in the event of a PC based disaster, the following can help:

- a) Save your work regularly
- b) Save your work in versions, especially large assignments to minimise loss of work in the event of a file corruption
- c) Backup your work regularly to CD, Memory Stick or using anonline service such as Dropbox or Microsoft OneDrive which is part of your Office 365 services as a student. You could also email assignment backups to yourself
- d) Make sure you have your computer's recovery disk available in case it needs reinstalling as a result of failure

APPENDIX 2: IT SKILLS GUIDANCE FOR DISTANCE LEARNING

Entrants may be expected to be computer literate, have access to a laptop, PC or mac and the Internet. If students are unsure of their technological ability and how this relates to study, they may be required to complete the following IT Audit and return it to their Programme Leader who will ascertain if they have the required level of digital skills to study via this route.

1	USING WINDOWS	Yes	No
1.1	Login and understand the password procedures (if applicable)		
1.2	Run an application using Desktop or Start menu shortcuts or the programs Menu		
1.3	Run several programs simultaneously and switch between them (multi-tasking)		
1.4	Minimise, maximise, restore, move, resize and close windows		

2	WINDOWS APPLICATIONS - GENERAL	Yes	No
2.1	Create a new file		
2.2	Save, Save as, and open a file		
2.3	Save a file in different folders or different drives (e.g. F :)		
2.4	Print a file		
2.5	Cut, copy and paste within a file, between files and applications		
2.6	Use the online help menu		

3	WORD PROCESSING (using Word)	Yes	No
3.1	Open a new blank document		
3.2	Save and edit documents		
3.3	Save in different formats, and earlier versions of word		
3.4	Use formatting techniques including headings, bold, underline, font sizes etc.		
3.5	Insert graphics (copy/paste/clip arts)		
3.6	Add headers and footers		
3.7	Use spell checker		
3.8	Insert tables		
3.9	Create publications using text boxes, Word Art		
3.10	Insert images/photographs		
3.11	Format text and using columns		

4	Internet	Yes	No
4.1a	Do you know what a URL is?		
4.1b	Do you know what a hyperlink is?		
4.1	Enter web addresses (URLs) to access sites directly		
4.2	Follow hyperlinks to access other pages and sites		
4.3	Copy text and graphics from the web		
4.4	Use one search engines e.g. Google		

4.5	Download multimedia files (music, video, images)		
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5	POWERPOINT	Yes	No
5.1	Create and use a PowerPoint presentation		
5.2	Edit a PowerPoint presentation		
5.3	Save a PowerPoint presentation		