BISHOP GROSSETESTE UNIVERSITY

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*Please note this document remains valid until formally revoked and replaced by the University.

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Introduction

1. This Code of Practice establishes principles for the development and conduct of flexible and distributed learning and has been designed to reflect the relevant precepts and guidance contained in the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2018)

2. The term flexible and distributed learning (afterwards referred to as FDL) refers to educational provision leading to an award, or to specific credit towards an award, which is delivered, wholly or in part, through means which are not reliant on the student's attendance at classes or live events at the University. This includes:

   - programmes which the student may complete with no, or only minimal, attendance e.g. distance and/or blended learning;
   - those in which regular attendance at the University is supplemented in varying degrees by additional support which includes work-based learning (see Code of Practice for Work-based Learning);
   - learning being delivered under a franchise agreement;
   - learning delivered in an international setting; and/or
   - to a certain extent learning at another validated provider.

   In some cases, similar arrangements may also be made in order to provide wider support services for students and for the conduct of assessment. It should be noted, however, that the term may be applied across a spectrum of delivery patterns. It should be noted that no attempt is made here to indicate a threshold in terms of the proportion of a programme delivered through FDL above which this Code of Practice applies. Consequently, in the development and approval of such programmes, programme teams and members of validation panels should apply its provisions in the way which they judge most appropriate to the particular circumstances.

Definition and scope

3. Where the term 'students' is used in this document, it should also refer to those students who are also apprentices' studying on a degree or higher apprenticeship.

4. Unless specifically stated this Code of Practice is applicable to Erasmus and International students studying at the University.

5. This Code should be read in conjunction with the University's Code of Practice for Collaborative Provision.

Development and approval of programmes for delivery through FDL

6. Programmes should be developed in accordance with the Code of Practice for the Validation of Programmes and the Distance Learning Framework.

7. Those which are delivered, supported and/or assessed through FDL can be valuable in extending opportunities to students who would not otherwise be able to access the University's courses. However, it should be recognised that such provision presents particular challenges for programme teams arising from the need to support students with whom direct contact is likely to be limited. It is essential that these challenges are dealt with in a way which safeguards the standard of the award and ensures that the quality of learning opportunities is equivalent to provision offered at the University, promoting equity. The University remains responsible for the academic standards of all awards made in its name wherever and however

the programme of study is delivered.

8. Although FDL does not necessarily involve the use of digital technologies, some form of electronic communication is frequently adopted for this purpose. Whatever medium is used to deliver the programme, the team must take steps to ensure that systems adopted are robust and secure, and that a strategy is in place to maintain the service to students in the event of technical or other difficulties. The system adopted should provide adequate security against unauthorised interference and arrangements should be in place to verify the safe receipt of course materials. Adherence to Internet Protocol (IP) related legislation must be ensured. Where assignments are submitted electronically, it is important that staff can verify that they are the work of the student. Equally, students must be able to feel confident that their work will be correctly attributed to them. These matters should normally be dealt with in the initial programme proposal. Where the intention is to make use of institutional systems and procedures to support FDL, the proposal should give details and demonstrate that the team has engaged with, and has the support of, the departments responsible for their operation and that those departments have a clear understanding of the particular requirements of the provision. Validation panels should also take care to satisfy themselves on these points before approving a programme for delivery through FDL.

9. Before agreeing to the development of FDL provision, the Head of School should be satisfied that the programme team is fully aware of the challenges and have the expertise to develop learning materials in an appropriate form. Quality of FDL materials must be ensured. The Head should be satisfied that a proposal to develop a programme through FDL has been fully costed and that appropriate arrangements have been negotiated with the departments that will be involved in supporting the infrastructure for the programme, including additional support for students. Consideration should be given to the way in which the needs of students with disabilities or learning difficulties will be met.

10. A professional body or similar organisation which has previously accredited a programme of study must be advised of the intention to offer it through FDL and confirmation must be sought as to whether the accreditation will apply to the new provision.

Alignment with the Codes of Practice

11. FDL provision must adhere to the University's own Codes of Practice governing its educational provision. Particular care should be taken to ensure that admissions procedures are compatible with the Code of Practice for the Admission of Students and that the assessment of the programme conforms to the Code of Practice for the Assessment of Students.

12. The arrangements for the external examining of FDL programmes should be consistent with the University's practice as set out in the Code of Practice for External Examining. It is important that examiners receive the briefing and guidance needed to carry out their responsibilities for maintaining standards and quality. In particular, they will need to be informed of the context of the provision for which they are responsible and to understand any special circumstances relating to the methods of assessment adopted e.g. assessments which are conducted on-line. Where a programme is offered through both FDL and University based delivery, it is important that the external examiner is able to scrutinise a sample of students' work representing both modes.

13. FDL programmes will be subject to the University's procedures for annual monitoring and periodic review; see Code of Practice for the Annual Monitoring of Academic Programmes. Evidence should include feedback from students and whether this is received electronically or in paper copy, due regard should be paid to preserving anonymity.

Information for students

14.   Advice and guidance should be available to students prior to enrolment regarding the expectations of the programme. To fulfil the requirements posed on universities by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), guidance on the technologies which students will require in order to access course materials and other opportunities to support their learning must be provided prior to the students' enrolling on their studies. A comprehensive induction will be provided which could be accessed remotely. The induction will typically include the following:

- the structure and requirements of the programme;
- support to enable students to understand the characteristics of FDL and the challenges it may present;
- the type and level of support provided by the University to enable development and achievement;
- the commitment of time that students may expect to make;
- an introduction to the systems which will be used to deliver these materials and support;
- detail of where technical advice can be obtained if required;
- mechanisms for and rules governing communication with other students; and
- how the University can support the formation of a supportive student community involved in FDL studies.

15.   As students may have only limited face-to-face contact with tutors, it is particularly important that the information which they receive about the programme should be detailed and comprehensive. Course documentation and handbooks must be readily available and should include details of the aims and learning outcomes for the programme as a whole and its component modules so that there is clarity with regard to the way in which any particular module relates to the overall structure. The quality of course materials must meet the normal expectations of the University for a programme leading to one of its awards.

16.   Students should be provided with a schedule for the delivery of the programme including the dates by when any formative and summative assessment must be completed. Students should be aware well in advance of any scheduled events. For example, these might include seminars or discussion groups supported by video conferencing, synchronous or asynchronous on-line discussion.

17.   Students must be provided with academic support. A named academic tutor will be contactable at agreed times by digital means. The tutor must be in a position to provide authoritative guidance about the programme and feedback on the student's performance.

18.   Students must also be provided with information regarding any additional services that will be provided and how these may be accessed. These might typically include general academic support and advice, digital learning support, details of University facilities, financial advice, counselling, student advice (including support for learning disabilities), student engagement and careers advice.

19.   Students must receive clear information with regard to the assessment requirements of the programme including:

- the arrangements for formative assessment;
- the arrangements and dates for the submission of work;

- the consequences of non-submission in accordance with the Code of Practice for the Assessment of Students;
- the date and means by which students will be advised of the outcome of the assessment;
- the requirements that must be met in order to progress to the next stage of the programme; and
- where appropriate, the aggregation of marks to arrive at an overall grade or award classification.

20.   Students must have access to and be made aware of all University Codes of Practice and Regulations.

Appeals and Complaints

21.   Students should be advised of the steps which should be taken if they wish to lodge an academic appeal against a decision of the board of examiners. The procedures are set out in the Code of Practice on Academic Appeals and this should be clearly referenced in course documentation.

22.   The attention of students should also be drawn to the Procedures for dealing with Complaints by Students so that they are familiar with the steps that should be taken if they are dissatisfied with aspects of the provision.