

03.2

VALIDATION OF BLENDED AND ONLINE PROGRAMMES

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(This Academic Handbook entry should be read in conjunction with ‘Validation of New Programmes’)

General

1. Cardiff Metropolitan University values the potential for widening participation that is enabled by blended and online learning opportunities, and it is expected that all blended and online provision will be subject to the appropriate quality assurance procedures and will meet the relevant precepts of the UK Quality Code. The academic standards and student experience of all awards delivered either wholly or partly through online learning should be comparable to campus-based programmes. They should also be compatible with any relevant UK benchmarking information and the University’s [10 Principles of Online Learning](#).
2. The University defines blended and online programmes as follows:
 - 1.1 Blended: A programme of study that offers blended learning is an approach that offers a ‘thoughtful fusion’ of scheduled on-campus teaching combined with learning opportunities accessible online (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008). Whilst there is no recommendation that exact delineation is practicable or appropriate, it should be considered a ‘Blended’ approach if between 20% and 80% of the scheduled learning is planned to be online. Blended learning differs from On-Campus learning when the programme team have undertaken to provide a significant proportion of their curriculum that is both scheduled and designed for flexible online access.
 - 1.2 Online: A programme that is wholly immersed digitally, without the expectation that students visit a campus base for scheduled learning. Online courses could still include an element of situated learning, such as placements, field-based research, or planned occasional activities (writing weekends, non-compulsory meetups) or occasional campus visits, but the intention is for deliberately scheduled online activity for almost all of the course. This aligns with HESA guidance for online or distance studying, which encompasses those students who are not in physical attendance for the whole of their course, with occasional exceptions such as summer schools, examinations, or events (HESA, 2020).

Validation

3. The validation process for blended or online programmes echoes that for campus-based programmes with the addition of the following points of scrutiny:
 - 3.1 Blended programmes:
 - the planned proportion of online learning opportunities;
 - the support planned for online engagement;
 - the minimum standards of Moodle (or other platform) page design;
 - the accessibility of learning opportunities;
 - the alignment of the proposal with the University’s 10 Principles of Online Learning;
 - 3.2 Online programmes:
 - the plan for student support across all levels;
 - work undertaken with L&IS, Employability and other support to embed guidance for students on how to ensure equal opportunity of accessing support and guidance;
 - the plan to meet key indicators of success in online learning including

- transparency, participation, flexibility and for interactivity and engagement;
 - the alignment of the proposal with the University's 10 Principles of Online Learning.
4. The process is designed to ensure that proposals will result in quality delivery, managed student experiences and output standards, which are sufficient for the needs of students and are equitable in relation to more traditionally delivered programmes.
 5. Details regarding the proposed methods of delivery should be proposed and approved by the Portfolio Development Committee in the first instance, who will consider the market, financial and strategic case for the proposal. Following PDC approval, all proposals will then be subject to 2 stages of academic scrutiny by the Programme Approval Standing Panel. The validation process is outlined in full on the [QED's Validation and Review webpages](#).
 6. The quality of learning resources is a critical variable in determining the acceptability of a blended or online proposal and the consequent student experience. Thus, whilst learning resources for an entire programme of study are not routinely required at validation, an appropriate process for the ongoing review of learning resources must be incorporated within the validation process. Should the Standing Panel have doubts about a blended or online proposal, then it is entitled to exercise its right to approve resources for the entire programme, possibly in a staged process.
 7. In order to assure the quality of proposals, in addition to providing the documentation required for traditional programmes, the validation panel should be provided with:
 - 7.1 examples of all teaching, learning and assessment materials for at least one module, together with details of the mechanisms in place within the School/Department for the development and quality assurance of blended and online materials;
 - 7.2 a specification of what information and materials will be made available to students throughout the course;
 - 7.3 details of the means by which students will have access to general learning resources;
 - 7.4 an explanation of what will be expected of students – initially and throughout the course;
 - 7.5 a description of who students should contact for assistance, with either academic-related problems or logistical problems relating to the mode of delivery;
 - 7.6 an explanation of how student progress on the course will be monitored, including any use of automatic progress chasing and assignment submission and return;
 - 7.7 details of how student motivation is maintained by incorporating interactive elements into the programme (such as self-assessments, chat rooms and discussion opportunities);
 - 7.8 details of technical support arrangements for online facilities;
 - 7.9 details of the pastoral support arrangements for students, distinguishing between local and central resources;
 - 7.10 details of the systems in place for Programme Directors to be able to monitor engagement to ensure standards of service to students;
 - 7.11 arrangements to identify and deal effectively with fraud, unfair practice and impersonation in order to ensure that students' assessed work can be properly attributed to them.

8. In preparing documentation for the validation of online or blended provision, due cognisance should be taken of the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education Advice and Guidance relating to learning and teaching, and the University's 10 Principles of Online Learning available on the [QED Design and Planning webpages](#).

The Standing Panel

9. Membership of the Standing Panel should be the same as that specified for all programmes with the additional requirement that that the Panel contains someone with experience of designing and delivering blended or online programmes.

Programme delivery

10. It is expected that the reliability of the delivery system for the programme, including means of confirming safe receipt of materials, will have been tested and that clear contingency plans are in place in the event of failure of the designed mode of delivery.
11. Staff developing programmes delivered through blended or online modes will be expected to have appropriate skills in the design and delivery of blended and online programmes, and will receive appropriate continuing training and development to support effective practice in this mode.

Student information

12. Students should be informed of the relative responsibilities of the University, the student and any collaborative partner, and should be provided with clear expectations of study and the nature of autonomous, directed, collaborative and supported learning.
13. Students should receive a schedule for:
 - the delivery of study materials
 - any learner support offered through timetabled activities, web-based conferences etc.
 - completion of learning activities and
 - submission of formative and summative assignments.
14. Students should have clear guidance on action to take should they encounter technical support difficulties.
15. Students should be provided with opportunities to feed back on the programme and other aspects of the student experience, and this feedback should inform programme review.

Review

16. All programmes delivered by blended and online learning are subject to monitoring, review and enhancement activity in accordance with the University's regulations.