**UNIVERSITY OF YORK**

**TEACHING COMMITTEE**

# Teaching Committee:Checklist for Distance Learning Programmes

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| This *pro forma* should be completed if you want to introduce: (a) a distance learning version of an existing campus-based taught programme, *OR* (b) an entirely new taught programme that will be delivered primarily by distance learning\*. In the case of (b), this *pro forma* is **supplementary** to the standard Teaching Committee New Programme *Pro Forma* (which is available from the Academic Support Office (ASO) webpages at: <http://www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/programme-development/programmes/approve/>).  If the programme you are proposing is entirely new, you will already have been asked to complete the **Planning Committee New Programme *Pro Forma***. If the programme is a distance learning version of an existing campus-based programme you should also complete the Planning Committee *pro forma (*which is available from the ASO webpages at: <http://www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/programme-development/programmes/approve/>) because there can be substantial initial and ongoing costs associated with distance learning provision, departments are encouraged to consult their Planning Officer regarding the impact of new programmes on their Medium-Term Plan (MTP), see: <http://www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/programme-development/programmes/distance/business-planning/>.  \*Distance learning is here defined as a way of providing higher education that involves the transfer to the student’s location of materials that form the main basis of study, rather than the student moving to the location of the resource provider. As a consequence of this physical separation, distance learning students do not have regular face-to-face contact with University staff, nor do they have immediate ‘in person’ access to the facilities and resources available to campus-based students. |

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| **Why do distance learning programmes require a separate/additional *pro forma*?**  The physical separation of distance learners from the University has major implications for programme design, development and delivery. The purpose of the *pro forma* is to reassure University Teaching Committee (UTC) that the department is aware of, and has addressed any issues arising from, these implications. |

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| **Sources of advice and support**   * There are a number of resources online to support prospective Distance Learning providers: <http://www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/programme-development/programmes/distance/> * The Distance Learning Forum provides a forum to exchange information and discuss issues of common interest and concern to DL providers: <http://www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/groups/distance/> * Members of the Distance Learning Forum may also be able to offer an additional level of support and advice: <http://www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/programme-development/programmes/distance/support/> * The E-Learning Development Team (can provide advice, support and training on pedagogic and technological issues for staff using the University’s Yorkshare VLE): <http://www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/programme-development/programmes/distance/support/> * The Academic Support Office (can provide advice on programme approval and direct you to resources on distance learning): <http://www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/programme-development/programmes/distance/support/> |

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| **Supporting documentation checklist** (NB all supporting documents should have page numbering).  All proposals for distance learning programme (whether entirely new or a distance learning version of an existing campus-based programme) require: (i) a **programme specification**, and (ii) a **report from an external assessor**.  The programme specification for a distance learning version of an existing campus-based programme could be an amended copy of the existing programme specification or a separate document, depending on the degree of difference between the distance learning and campus-based versions. The external assessor should have the relevant knowledge and experience to comment on the suitability of the proposed arrangements in relation to the distance learning elements of the programme (if the programme is completely new, this may (or may not) be the same individual who provides comments on the academic merit of the programme).  UTC may request a sample of distance learning materials, particularly if the department has little or no experience of distance learning or there have been any concerns about the department’s approach to distance learning.   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Documentation** | **Provided Y/N** | | Comments from an external assessor on the distance learning arrangements |  | | A programme specification |  | | Sample distance learning materials (if requested) |  | |

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| **Completing the *pro forma***   * **Boxes will expand as you write** * The responses should be self-contained but, where appropriate, you may include URLs that lead to further or supporting information contained in, for example, departmental policies * If you have any questions about completing the *pro forma* please contact your QA departmental contact <http://www.york.ac.uk/about/departments/support-and-admin/academic-support/staff/quality-assurance/> or Laura Crossley (ext. 2156, [laura.crossley@yrok.ac.uk](mailto:laura.crossley@yrok.ac.uk)) * A copy of the completed *pro forma* and supporting documentation should be forwarded **electronically** to the ASO ([aso@york.ac.uk](mailto:aso@york.ac.uk)) for consideration by University Teaching Committee (UTC), note the paper deadlines for UTC: <http://www.york.ac.uk/about/organisation/governance/sub-committees/teaching-committee/papers/>. |

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| **PLANNING** |
| 1 Have you completed and returned the Planning Committee New Programme *Pro Forma*?  You should be aware that distance learning programmes may face some recognition issues in certain countries (e.g. China), which may limit their marketability. The International Office can provide advice on this matter. |
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| 2 Does the department have any experience of developing and/or delivering a distance learning programme of the sort being proposed? If yes, please provide brief details. |
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| **PROGRAMME DESIGN** |
| 3 If the programme is a distance learning version of an existing campus-based programme, are there any differences between the two versions other than the mode of delivery? For example, do the two versions differ in terms of length, modular structure, assessment etc.?  If the distance learning and campus-based versions share the same title, it is expected that both will share the same programme aims and intended learning outcomes, and that other differences will be kept to an absolute minimum and will be justifiable on pedagogic grounds. |
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| 4 How will the programme be delivered?  Delivery systems convey programme content and can provide the means by which students can interact with academic staff and each other. Possible modes of delivery include: e-learning (via a virtual learning environment (VLE) e.g. the University’s VLE - Yorkshare), other computer-based materials (e.g. DVDs), and paper-based materials - with support provided online, by telephone or by post. Often a programme will use a combination of approaches. The chosen delivery system should be fit for its purpose and, if technology is involved, should have an appropriate availability and life expectancy. |
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| 5 If the programme includes face-to-face elements e.g. residential blocks or face-to-face tutorials or conferences please provide brief details (when, where, how long) and note whether these elements will be compulsory or optional. |
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| 6 What is the rationale, in terms of the underlying pedagogy, for the choice of delivery system? In particular, how will students be encouraged to engage and interact with the subject matter? |
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| 7 Does the proposal affect a programme which has (or might in the future have) professional, statutory or regulatory body approval? If yes, please confirm that you have informed that body of your plans. |
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| **PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT** |
| 8 Who is responsible for coordinating the programme development project?  The project coordinator has a vital role to play in producing a clear specification for the programme materials, managing the creation of the materials, and ensuring that contributors (designers/writers) are properly trained and working to agreed project deadlines. |
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| 9 Who is writing/designing or will write/design the programme materials? Do they have the relevant pedagogical and, where relevant, technological expertise? If individuals from outside the department are commissioned to write/design the materials, will the department own the intellectual property rights and how will the materials be updated?  For programmes using Yorkshare, contributors should be familiar with standards/templates for materials development and resources should be consistent with technical and accessibility standards supporting their future reuse/repurposing. |
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| 10 At what stage of development is the programme? Please provide a brief timetable detailing the work that has been completed and that which remains to be undertaken (indicating the proposed start date).  It can be extremely time consuming to develop (design/write/test materials and train staff) a good distance learning programme and UTC will need to be reassured that there is sufficient time to undertake the work required prior to the proposed start date. |
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| 11 In the case of a programme that will use Yorkshare as the delivery platform, have you sought feedback on a project outline from the E-learning Development Team (ELDT)? Has the ELDT raised any questions about the nature of your project and/or the proposed start date? Are you making use/will you make use of the ELDT’s Distance Learning Development Checklist? |
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| 12 Please indicate how, when and by whom the distance learning programme (or elements thereof) has been/will be tested/piloted.  A test/pilot phase for the programme (the academic content *and* the mode of delivery) is essential to ensure that everything runs smoothly for the first cohort of students. |
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| 13 How secure (safe from interception or other interference) and reliable will the programme delivery system be? Will there be a means of confirming the safe receipt of materials? What contingency plans will come into operation in the event of the failure of the designated mode(s) of delivery (e.g. a serious problem with the VLE, a lengthy postal strike)? |
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| 14 What steps are being taken to ensure that the programme will be accessible to disabled students? For example, will VLE and other computer-based materials meet accessibility standards and will programme materials be made available in alternative formats?  The ELDT can provide advice on the accessibility of VLE materials. |
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| **PROGRAMME DELIVERY – STAFF** |
| 15 Who will provide academic support\* for the students and what is their contractual relationship with the University? Will the staff providing academic support have the relevant pedagogical, and where relevant, technological expertise? Please describe how the staff will be selected and trained, and the availability of ongoing support (e.g. a staff handbook, a peer network) and opportunities to engage in continuing professional development opportunties relevant to their role. How will the staff will be monitored and peer observed?  \*(i.e. fulfil the role that would be taken by lecturer/seminar leader or similar in a face-to-face programme e.g. provision of tutorial support, facilitation of group discussions, provision of feedback on formative and summative assessed work etc.)  Members of the Distance Learning Forum can provide advice on the training opportunties that they have found to be useful (these include programmes run by other universities including the Open University). |
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| **PROGRAMME DELIVERY – STUDENT SUPPORT** |
| 16 How will students access the necessary learning resources? What learning resources will students have automatic access to (whether electronically or in hard copy)? How will students access additional reading materials (e.g. online, via the University Library’s distance learning service, via the Libraries Plus scheme)? Departments are asked to discuss their learning resource requirements with the Library (Jackie Knowles [jackie.knowles@york.ac.uk](mailto:jackie.knowles@york.ac.uk) or via <http://www.york.ac.uk/library/servicesandfacilities/distancelearners/>). |
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| 17 How will the students be provided with academic and pastoral supervision?  Departments will need to establish an alternative means of providing supervisory support to the traditional face-to-face interview required in the Supervision Policy, each term, and on an *ad hoc* basis as required. Some departments have found that distance learning students have greater supervisory needs because they do not have access in person to the range of informal and formal support mechanisms (peers, student support services etc.) that campus-based students do, and because they are more likely to be in paid work and have complex domestic circumstances. Departments are reminded that the standard restrictions on who may serve as a supervisor apply equally to distance learning programmes. |
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| 18 Who will provide administrative and technological (if required) support for the students?  Departments may find it helpful to have a single first point of contact for administrative and technological queries. Departments are reminded that they are responsible for providing ‘first line’ IT support for computer-based programme materials (the Computer Service is responsible for resolving faults within centrally supported software and systems (including the University VLE as a whole) – this service is restricted to office hours). |
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| 19 How will the programme team establish a community of learners, providing collaborative learning opportunties (knowledge sharing and creation), peer support and a basis for student participation in the quality assurance and enhancement of the programme? |
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| 20 What opportunties will be provided to ensure that those students who wish to feel part of the broader University community can do so? |
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| 21 How will students evaluate modules and their programme as a whole? How will the students be represented on departmental committees? How will the students be informed of action taken in response to their feedback?  Distance learning programmes often require alternative methods of module/programme evaluation, student representation and closing the feedback loop to ensure a good level of student engagement (e.g. a virtual staff-student committee). |
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| **PROGRAMME DELIVERY – ASSESSMENT** |
| 22 Describe the means of assessment and the measures that will be taken to ensure that they are secure. Are the mechanisms (e.g. web-based or correspondence) for the transfer of work to assessors secure (safe from interception or other interference) and reliable? Is there a means by which students can confirm the safe receipt of assessed work? Please provide details. |
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| 23 What measures will be put in place to authenticate students’ work, particularly where the assessment is conducted through remote means? How will students be trained in the avoidance of academic misconduct? |
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| 24 The department is reminded that the external examiner appointed to the programme should have experience of distance learning as well as subject expertise. Is this requirement likely to present any difficulties? |
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| **PROGRAMME DELIVERY – DOCUMENTATION** |
| All students should receive clear, consistent and sufficiently detailed programme documentation but it is, perhaps, particularly critical for distance learning students who cannot easily approach a member of staff in person for clarification.  The documentation for the programme should include:   1. a comprehensive student handbook which includes programme aims and learning outcomes, full module descriptions, assessment details and information about learning resources and learning support. The handbook should clarify how the full range of student services (from counselling to careers) can be accessed by distance learning students; 2. a clear schedule for the programme, including the delivery of study materials, assessment points and the provision of feedback on work; 3. a document which outlines students’ responsibilities as learners (e.g. in terms of participation in group activities), and students’ rights to academic and pastoral support (e.g. in terms of frequency of contact from the programme team, anticipated response times for email and telephone queries, provision of feedback on work).   Prospective students should receive a clear and realistic explanation of the expectations that will be placed upon them by a distance learning programme, including the nature and extent of autonomous, collaborative and supported aspects of learning. Prospective students should also understand any minimum specifications for hardware/software/network speed/security (firewalls) etc. and IT literacy.  When giving dates and times for programme events (e.g. an online synchronous discussion or the submission of an assignment), documentation should be clear about what time zone is being used (e.g. by 17.00 GMT on 18 March). |
| **Interim review and recruitment restrictions**  The impact of distance learning on programme design, development and delivery means that distance learning programmes pose a potentially higher risk than campus-based programmes. For example, difficulties can take longer to be identified, and can be harder to resolve, when face-to-face contact between staff and students is limited.  As a consequence:   1. UTC will normally make continuing approval of a distance learning programme conditional upon a satisfactory interim review of the programme in the second or third year of its operation (following a successful interim review, the programme will be subject to periodic review with the rest of the department’s provision); 2. UTC may impose a limit on the number of distance learning students recruited in the first three years of distance learning programme’s operation (large numbers of students during the initial phase of a programme’s existence can magnify any difficulties that arise).   As (b) may affect the financial viability of some programmes, a limit will only be imposed following a process of consultation with the department concerned. |