Flexible Learning
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APPENDIX:
INTRODUCTION

UK Quality Code for Higher Education (UKQCHE) Chapter B3 ‘Learning and teaching’ observes that “UK higher education embraces a wide variety of modes of both learning and teaching, which can be used in different combinations. These include flexible and distributed learning, work-based or placement learning, and technology-enhanced learning”\(^1\). Flexible learning provides a means of attuning provision to the particular needs and interests of students (and their employers) and can be distinguished from conventional learning on the basis of (i) location, where unlike classroom-based activities the time and place of learning are to some extent controlled by the student; and (ii) prescription, where unlike conventional modules there is some flexibility to negotiate content, learning outcomes and assessment activities. Such delegation to the learner must be balanced by rigorous and appropriate arrangements for quality assurance and this chapter of the Quality Management Handbook provides guidance for the following:

- **Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL)** - the delivery of taught provision through information and communications technology (ICT) comprising the internet and other electronic media and including distance learning. At Edge Hill TEL also applies to online activity that complements classroom teaching.
  - **Placement learning** – including practice-based learning (health and education).
  - **Study Abroad** – including Erasmus exchange programmes.
  - **Student-Initiated Credit** – individually-negotiated learning that leads to the award of credit.

This chapter also deals with the **Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning** and takes account of the Expectation of UKQCHE Chapter B6 ‘Assessment of students and recognition of prior learning’ that “Higher education providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.”\(^2\)

(Note: This chapter does not deal with the Recognition of Prior Certificated Learning which is addressed within the University’s Academic Regulations.\(^3\))

1. TECHNOLOGY ENHANCED LEARNING (TEL)

Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL), still occasionally referred to as ‘e-learning’, involves the use of electronic media, educational technology and information and communication technologies (ICT) in delivering programmes of study. TEL can be used to support flexible (blended\(^4\) and distance) learning or classroom-based learning and can be tutor-led

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2. Ibid.
3. Academic Regulations section C7 & Appendix 8 [http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/governance/strategies-policies/](http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/governance/strategies-policies/).
4. Blended learning programmes combine elements of face-to-face delivery with distance learning, for example part-time programmes of study where students attend block teaching periods that are followed up by engagement with online teaching resources and guided independent study.
and synchronous or self-paced and asynchronous. The standard agenda for programme validation\(^5\) includes discussion of how TEL will be used to support learning in any of these modes. Validation panels consider:

- The range of technologies to be used and their application to learning.
- The systems by which TEL will be made available – notably via the Blackboard Learning Edge Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)\(^6\) - and their fitness-for-purpose, reliability, accessibility and security with appropriate contingency for technical failure\(^7\).
- How staff are trained and supported in creating and maintaining high-quality interactive learning materials and the extent to which the University’s baseline expectation for use of the VLE within programmes is met or exceeded (see below).
- How blended or distance learning students are inducted and supported, particularly where they are working alone or there is limited face-to-face contact with tutors.
- How TEL may be used to foster collaborative learning and engagement between students on blended and distance learning programmes, e.g. through online discussion groups and ‘virtual’ programme boards and/or student-staff consultative fora.
- How TEL is reviewed and evaluated as part of programme monitoring including adaptation of existing methods for the review of classroom-based teaching to ensure the continued appropriateness of learning materials and student support in the online environment.

‘The Learning Edge VLE Baseline’

The initial ‘VLE Baseline’ was introduced in 2008 as a strategy to provide a consistent student experience within each programme/department and to drive greater and more consistent use of the Learning Edge VLE. Each Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee agreed its own mandatory baseline but in the intervening years, these were extended informally with improved VLE functionality, and formally via policy decisions on electronic submission of coursework and typed feedback. The mandatory baseline/minimum threshold was updated in 2015 to take account of current policy and practice and introduced two additional levels, \(’\text{Baseline}’\) and \(’\text{Baseline}^+’\) and \(’\text{Baseline}^{++}’\):

\(^5\) See Form PAVS1 ‘Stage One: Curriculum Approval Proforma Agenda for Validation’ at http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/aqdu/validation/
\(^6\) Where the University’s programmes are delivered by or with collaborative partner organisations validation panels will consider the Virtual Learning Environments of both organisations.
\(^7\) See UK Quality Code for Higher Education Chapter B10 ‘Managing higher education provision with others’ http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/quality-code-B10.aspx
## Learning Edge Baseline and Baseline+ (updated 7th December 2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Baseline+ (Indicative)</th>
<th>Baseline++ (Indicative)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administration and Orientation</td>
<td>Programme and/or Module handbook (depending on area) (PDF format for mobile and operating system accessibility—see also Resources below)</td>
<td>Staff contact details including photograph, availability, contact information</td>
<td>Tutors talking head video introductions&lt;sup&gt;8&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Link to timetables</td>
<td>Use Calendar tool</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure and Navigation</td>
<td>Page items presented in a logical structure and sequence (usually chronological)</td>
<td>Faculty, Departmental or Programme templates used for consistency</td>
<td>Students guided through course by timed release of content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Links checked to ensure still live. Broken links updated or removed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Announcements tool for urgent information updates e.g. room changes, cancellations (one way)</td>
<td>Q&amp;A Discussion fora provided for 2-way communication. Purpose of fora and how to engage is provided</td>
<td>News panel displayed on VLE home page owned and managed by Faculty or Department. Provides local, non-urgent information&lt;sup&gt;9&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Preparatory materials available up to 1 week before session. Presentation slides, notes, hand-outs available via the</td>
<td>Compress files to minimise file size and aid students viewing on mobile devices. File size and type displayed alongside</td>
<td>Bespoke content that requires specialist skills e.g. simulations, games,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>8</sup> For example, could be self-produced by webcam or commissioned from Learning Services Media Development team

<sup>9</sup> Part of Learning Services LTD development activity, working with Faculties/Departments. Will move to baseline+, then baseline once rolled out.
| VLE within 1 week of session. | the filename e.g. Introduction to infection control 34MB PDF 68KB | videos\(^{12}\), interactive resources |
| Cross-platform and mobile-accessible PDF format used unless documents need to be accessed for editing | Teaching content in presentation software, e.g. PowerPoint enhanced by multimedia/narration/quiz functionality e.g. via iSpring plug-in. Renders on any device (and mobile accessible) | Videos, links, images and texts display well on mobile devices including smartphones |
| Support learners with additional requirements by making alternative resources i.e. transcripts for videos (if used) and use of colour contrast, font and text size in content\(^{10}\) | Allow students to revisit lectures using lecture capture streamed via the VLE | Activities specifically designed to harness mobile device features (e.g. camera, apps) to aid ‘anytime, anyplace learning’ |
| Faculty or Departmental library resources available via a tab in VLE\(^{11}\) | Use webcam or personal screen/desktop capture software to produce audio/video e.g. to highlight key concepts to students in any given topic | Embed links to external online resources |
| **Assessment and Feedback** | **Outline and dates for each assessment provided along with instructions, marking criteria, coversheets** | **Student work marked in digital format (either online or offline)** |
| | | **Student mark, return of work and feedback released via the use of** |
| | | **Use of Blackboard tests/quizzes for formative assessment** |

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\(^{10}\) Accessible documents and presentations: [http://www.jisctechdis.ac.uk/techdis/resources/accessdocpres](http://www.jisctechdis.ac.uk/techdis/resources/accessdocpres)

\(^{11}\) Managed by Learning Services

\(^{12}\) Role of LS Media Development – providers of video content that academics cannot be expected to build for themselves.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Student Participation and Engagement</strong></th>
<th><strong>Monitor student use of courses in the VLE using the Course Reports tool and Performance Dashboard</strong></th>
<th><strong>Using the Retention Centre, identify students where lack of engagement with the VLE is giving a cause for concern</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assignment submission drop boxes (where appropriate). Students provided with clear instructions on how to submit electronic documents (Blackboard Assignment, Turnitin) and opportunity to rehearse use</td>
<td>Links to guides and where to go for help in the event of a problem submitting work</td>
<td>Blackboard Collaborate used to deliver webinars or support to students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students share and/or build resources using online tools such as blogs, wikis</td>
<td>Students encouraged to complete their Blackboard profiles to improve visibility within VLE</td>
<td>Use of Collaborate or multimedia presentations to deliver a ‘flipped classroom’ approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students encouraged to use the cloud social spaces within Blackboard for student-owned discussion and to</td>
<td>the My Grades feature in the VLE</td>
<td>Students encouraged to use the cloud social spaces within Blackboard for student-owned discussion and to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student end of module evaluations use Bristol Online Surveys or Blackboard survey tool to collect and collate feedback</td>
<td>link to peers/practitioners in other institutions both nationally and globally Use of polling tools or an anonymous discussion forum in the VLE to obtain snapshots of student opinion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal/Professional Development Portfolio</strong></td>
<td>Students use tools e.g. Campus Pack blogs and wikis for reflection on learning or practice and portfolio building.</td>
<td>Campus Pack portfolio assessed via the Blackboard Grade Centre</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above guidance is underpinned by the following principles:

- The Baseline is mandatory but ‘Baseline+’ and ‘++’ are purely indicative, drawing upon existing good practice within the University and the wider HE sector.
- Course development in the VLE should be based upon sustainable academic practices. Courses and teaching content in Blackboard should be developed and ‘owned’ by academic colleagues and not routinely delegated to others.
- By making no reference to pedagogy, it recognises that the pedagogic expert is the individual practitioner. However, it is hoped that this document will spark conversations, innovations and multi-professional approaches with learning technologists, media developers and information specialists.
- The Baseline will continue to evolve in response to feedback from staff and students, to strategic initiatives, and to improvements or developments in software and systems.

The Baseline guidance provides a simple means of ‘auditing’ a module or programme’s VLE presence and in this regard it may be used in conjunction with the University’s pre-existing Framework for the Quality Assurance of Technology Enhanced Learning during programme development and review. Additional guidance is available on request to the Centre for Learning and Teaching (Dean of Teaching and Learning Development) and Learning Services (Assistant Head, Learning, ICT and Media Technologies).

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14 [http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/solstice/](http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/solstice/).
When reviewing Applications for Development Consent\textsuperscript{14} for new programmes the Academic Planning Committee (APC)\textsuperscript{15} considers whether TEL is mainly supplemental to classroom-based delivery or will constitute an “essential, integral component[s] of the student learning experience... removal [of which] would result in a detrimental effect on the learning experience such that the curriculum would not be able to be delivered”\textsuperscript{16}. Where the latter applies, APC normally requires a SOLSTICE Fellow\textsuperscript{17} to join the Stage 2 Validation panel\textsuperscript{18}. Although new modules do not require APC development consent, modules intended for delivery as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) require initial notification to APC before Faculty approval can proceed.

\section*{2. PLACEMENT LEARNING}

Many Edge Hill University programmes provide the opportunity for students to undertake learning in the workplace through the completion of formal (credit-bearing) or informal placements. Work-Based Learning (WBL) developed in association with employers is one of the defining characteristics of a Foundation degree\textsuperscript{19} where the University’s regulations specify that at least a quarter of the programme must be delivered through WBL, either in specific placement modules or embedded within taught modules\textsuperscript{20}. In the Faculties of Education and Health & Social Care, trainee teachers and health practitioners undertake practice-based learning as part of their professional training and other programmes provide extra-curricular placement opportunities whereby students acquire knowledge and experience that help them to achieve the programme learning outcomes and enhance their personal and professional development. The Faculty of Arts and Sciences has also validated Sandwich degrees which enable undergraduates to undertake at least 32 weeks of supervised work experience for which they receive academic credit that contributes to their final degree award\textsuperscript{21}.

Approval and monitoring of placement learning opportunities

Chapter B10 of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education ‘Managing higher education provision with others’ contains the Expectation that “Degree-awarding bodies take ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, irrespective of where these are delivered or who provides them. Arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the degree-awarding body are implemented securely and managed effectively”\textsuperscript{22}. Whilst Faculties have delegated responsibility for the approval and monitoring of

\begin{itemize}
  \item See QMHE Chapter 4.
  \item See QMHE Chapter 8.
  \item See Appendix.
  \item \url{http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/solstice/}.
  \item\textsuperscript{18} A full description of the Institutional Validation process is contained in QMHE Chapter 4 with associated guidance on ‘Preparing for Validation’.
  \item\textsuperscript{19} See ‘Foundation Degree Characteristics Statement’ (QAA, 2015) \url{http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Foundation-Degree-Characteristics-15.pdf}.
  \item\textsuperscript{20} Academic Regulations section C12 \url{http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/governance/strategies-policies/}.
  \item\textsuperscript{21} Academic Regulations section J3.10 \url{http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/governance/strategies-policies/}.
  \item\textsuperscript{22} \url{http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/quality-code-B10.pdf}.
\end{itemize}
individual placement opportunities, Institutional validation panels consider the following when approving programmes:

1. *(Where the student is not already in relevant employment)* The identification of placement opportunities which offer a learning experience that meets the needs and expectations of students and enables achievement of the relevant learning outcomes. Panels consider whether students will source their own placements (with support) or have placements provided for them and where such responsibility is located.

2. *(Where the student is already in employment)* How the appropriateness of the student’s own work setting to the learning aims and outcomes is established.

   **Possible questions:**
   - Who sources or organises the placements?
   - What is the structure and duration of the placement?
   - What is the purpose of the placement (e.g. to meet compulsory requirements of the programme; an employability opportunity; to develop certain skills/ to gain certain experience)?
   - Is credit attached to the placement/is the student assessed for competency?
   - Details of potential placement partners, including any overseas arrangements.
   - What funding is provided for the placement provider?

3. Quality assurance and risk assessment of placement settings and formal agreements with placement providers *(see also ‘Learning agreements’, below).*

   **Possible questions:**
   - Who has responsibility for identifying and organising placement opportunity?
   - Who approves this?
   - Who monitors and evaluates the placement?
   - If overseas, is there clear process outlining the relationship between the International Office and Faculty?
   - How do different role holders liaise and share information?
   - Are there clear definitions of who has responsibility for different parts of the process?
   - Is a risk assessment necessary? By whom is it conducted?

4. Preparation and support for students before, during and after their placements.

   **Possible questions:**
   - How are students prepared in advance of the placement commencing?
   - What support is available to students during the placement, both from EHU and placement provider?

5. Assessment and evaluation of placements.

6. Recruitment, development and support of employer-mentors including their preparation for assessment (where this applies).

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23 Category ‘A’ collaborative provision, see QMH Chapter 5. Faculty approval processes for placements are described in Faculty Academic Quality Statements, see QMH Chapter 1.
7. Arrangements for managing incomplete or unsatisfactory placement experiences. 
8. Managing student or employer complaints or disciplinary issues that arise whilst a student is on placement.

Possible questions:
- How is assessment carried out? Who is responsible for this? 
- How do the students evaluate their experience and articulate skills acquired? 
- How is feedback gathered from the placement provider on the student? 
- How is feedback gathered from the placement provider on Edge Hill’s placement management? 
- Does feedback go to a committee or panel? 
- How is the feedback loop closed? 
- How does this evaluation feed into planning for next year?

A taxonomy of placement types in use in Edge Hill programmes is being developed to support the approval and monitoring of placement learning.

Learning agreements

UK Quality Code for Higher Education Chapter B10 ‘Managing higher education provision with others’ states that for work placements “degree-awarding bodies... consider establishing a contract with the student, clarifying the responsibilities of each of the parties (including the student) and what each is expected to deliver” which is “proportionate to the scale and nature of the activities involved”. Learning agreements, which should be signed before a student commences the placement, may cover:

- The roles, responsibilities and obligations of the University, the placement provider and the student. 
- Employer’s liability and compliance with statutory obligations e.g. concerning equality, data protection, freedom of information, health and safety, and environmental law. 
- Ownership of copyright and intellectual property rights for work produced by the student while on placement. 
- Provisions that enable the University or placement provider to suspend or withdraw from the agreement if any party fails to meet its obligations.

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24 Where a substitute placement cannot be provided and an alternative mode of assessment is required, course teams describe this in the Additional Assessment Information section of the relevant Module Specification. In all circumstances, alternative assessment must be capable of testing the Intended Learning Outcome(s). 
25 By the Placements Group of the Learning and Teaching Committee with publication expected during academic year 2016-17. 
27 Ibid, see UKQCHE Chapter B10, Indicator 7.
3. STUDY ABROAD

Undergraduate students of Edge Hill University may undertake a period of study abroad which contributes to their undergraduate degree award, either through the European Union’s Erasmus exchange programme or negotiated with an individual overseas provider. Study abroad is normally via an additional year (third year of four) located between levels 5 and 6 or, exceptionally, a single semester replacing part of the second year of study. Where taken over one year, an additional 120 ungraded level 5 credits are awarded which appear on the student’s transcript but do not contribute to their final degree classification. Where taken as a single semester, study abroad contributes 60 ungraded credits to the student’s 120 level 5 credits and is excluded from the degree classification.

UK Quality Code for Higher Education Chapter B10 ‘Managing higher education provision with others’ states that:

“Degree-awarding bodies which deliver study abroad or exchange schemes with other awarding bodies as part of structured programmes of study set out arrangements for credit recognition in their regulatory frameworks. They retain responsibility for ensuring that the modules proposed to be available abroad are at a level appropriate to achieve the intended learning outcomes for that component of the overall programme.”

The Expectation of UKQCHE B10 that awarding bodies have ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities provided by others applies equally to study abroad arrangements and Faculties develop processes for approving and delivering them according to the principles set out below.

European Higher Education Area (including Erasmus)

For Erasmus and other study abroad within the European Higher Education Area the EHEA’s First Cycle qualification descriptor provides a reference point for judging an overseas programme’s equivalence to a UK undergraduate degree as defined within the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ, QAA 2014). When selecting the modules to be taken abroad the Edge Hill department (with advice from the external examiner) determines the stage of the provider’s programme that equates most closely to the FHEQ level at which the student is to be assessed (typically level 5) and the alignment of module content and learning objectives with the relevant Edge Hill programme aims and learning outcomes. The European Credit Transfer System enables direct transfer of credit from an EHEA awarding institution where 1 ECTS credit equals 2 UK HE credits. ECTS credit imported from Erasmus study exchanges does not contribute to degree award classification which negates the requirement to scale marks.

28 See Academic Regulations section J3.10 http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/governance/strategies-policies/.

Edge Hill University Quality Management Handbook
Chapter 7 Flexible Learning
Institutional contact: Professor Mark Schofield, ext. 4101
Latest version: October 2016
Other overseas territories

For study outside the European Higher Education Area UK NARIC provides a service which compares overseas and UK higher education qualifications. When selecting the modules to be taken abroad the Edge Hill department (with advice from the external examiner) determines the stage of the provider’s programme that equates most closely to the FHEQ level at which the student is to be assessed (typically level 5) and the alignment of module content and learning objectives with the relevant Edge Hill programme aims and learning outcomes. In addition to level, the department establishes broad equivalence between the volume of learning and assessment to be undertaken and the Notional Learning Hours for which Edge Hill credit is to be awarded (where 1 credit represents 10 NLHs).

Study abroad arrangements are supported by signed agreements that describe the roles and responsibilities of the University, overseas provider and EHU student; how the student will be taught, supported and assessed; and how complaints or disciplinary issues that arise while the student is abroad will be managed. Where they occur, study abroad opportunities are also evaluated within programme monitoring and at departmental autumn monitoring and periodic review.

4. STUDENT-INITIATED CREDIT

Where students have failed a module after initial re-assessment there is the opportunity to substitute another module or to undertake a negotiated learning module for the award of Student-Initiated Credit. Student-Initiated Credit is also available for students whom an assessment board permits to transfer from an Ordinary degree to an Honours degree. Proposals for Student-Initiated Credit are considered and approved by Faculties using the process described in their Faculty Academic Quality Statements and are supported by learning agreements which typically include the following information:

1. The student’s name, department/area and the programme/year on which they are enrolled.
2. The rationale for Student-Initiated Credit.
3. The code, title and credit value of the module to be replaced and the code, title and credit value of the replacement module.

34 http://ectis.co.uk/naric/.
35 See UKQCHE Chapter B10, Indicator 7.
36 See QMH Chapter 3.
37 Up to 40 credits may be substituted subject to ensuring consistency with the validated programme learning outcomes and that any modules designated ‘core’ to the programme/award are not substituted. See Academic Regulations section H12.8 http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/governance/strategies-policies/.
38 Academic Regulations section I4.6 http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/governance/strategies-policies/.
39 See QMH Chapter 1.
40 Which may be a validated ‘shell module’ of the appropriate level and credit value containing generic learning outcomes against which negotiated content and assessment are applied.
4. The proposed module content, intended learning outcomes and assessment that have been negotiated between the student and tutor and how the module learning outcomes align with the programme learning outcomes for the student’s award.
5. Submission date for assessment.
6. Signatures of the tutor and student indicating their agreement of the negotiated learning.
7. External examiner’s approval.
8. Signature of the approving authority, e.g. PVC Dean or Associate Dean of Faculty or chair of the relevant Faculty committee.

5. RECOGNITION OF PRIOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING (RPEL)

The University recognises learning gained elsewhere, whether through academic qualifications and credit acquired from other relevant courses of study or through recognition of learning acquired outside formal education and training, for example work or life experience from which specific skills or knowledge have been gained (referred to ‘experiential learning’). Previous learning that is recognised in this way may be used towards meeting the entry requirements for a programme and/or for exemption from part of a programme. It is the responsibility of students to claim for recognition of their prior learning and Faculties have systems and processes to support them in making claims and having them assessed. Prior experiential learning is generally assessed by means of a portfolio that typically includes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The claimant’s personal details:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Vitae:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current job description:</td>
<td>This should be included only if the claim is for learning from work that includes, or is relevant to, the claimant’s current post. Where no formal job description exists the claimant should develop his or her own job description.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| The Claim:                       | |
|----------------------------------| |
| This should state the learning outcomes achieved, the level and volume of credit being claimed and (for advanced entry) any modules from which exemption is being sought. |

| Evidence of Learning Achievement: | |
|-----------------------------------| |
| This should comprise the primary documentary evidence adduced by the claimant in their Reflective Account (below). |

| Reflective Account:             | |
|----------------------------------| |
| This should be explicitly cross-referenced to (and evaluate) the learning outcomes and the evidence of learning achievement. Length, content and style should be appropriate to the volume and level of credit being claimed. The account should demonstrate that the student has engaged with the relevant academic literature |

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41 For Student-Initiated Credit at Level 5 and above.
42 See the Academic Regulations section C7 ‘Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Transfer’, available from http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/governance/strategies-policies/.
43 See QMH Chapter 1 ‘Faculty Academic Quality Statements’.
and be properly referenced. It should be produced in anticipation of the criteria against which the claim for credit will be assessed which will include its:

- **Validity**: the match between the evidence presented and the learning achieved;
- **Sufficiency**: sufficient volume and breadth of evidence, including reflection, to demonstrate the achievement of all the outcomes claimed;
- **Authenticity**: the evidence must be clearly related to the applicant’s own efforts and achievements (independent verification may be specified);
- **Currency**: demonstrating that what is being assessed is current learning.

Claimants receive support and guidance in producing their portfolios and initial assessment is by a member of staff other than the designated support tutor. External examiners review a sample of portfolios negotiated with the department/Faculty which is typically larger than for modules delivered and assessed conventionally. Ultimate responsibility for the assessment of RPEL claims resides with the appropriate Faculty assessment board.

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44 See QMH Chapter 2.
APPENDIX

Framework for Quality Assurance of the ‘E’
‘F’ and ‘D’ in Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) (updated October 2014)

AIMS

- To support colleagues in designing TEL processes with reference to:
  — The UK Quality Code for Higher Education Chapter B3: ‘Learning and teaching’;
  — The previous QAA Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards
    in higher education, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning
    (including e-learning) - Amplified version (2010) which has served as a useful source of
    benchmarks.

- To provide a framework/tool to assist assembly of curriculum and to support validation and
  review processes, particularly where e-learning and/or other technology are essential, integral
  components of the student learning experience.

- To provide an articulation of the University’s position maintaining the security and protection
  of delivery systems in supporting the student learning experience, including contingencies
  for failures related to technology

For clarity, ‘essential’, and ‘integral’ refers to the position technology holds within the curriculum.
To determine if the technology is integral or essential within a module/programme consider if its
removal would mean that the curriculum would not be able to be delivered. In contrast, if
technology is removed and no noteworthy affects occur, e.g. where the VLE is used as a repository
for storage of further information, then this would be classified as ‘additional’ and have less
critical impact on the learner’s experience. This document is not exclusively aimed at the use of
the institutions’ chosen VLE and also relates to other technologies including those that may
emerge in the future. Course teams and validation panels are advised to exercise care and
discretion in using externally-hosted social networking technologies such as Facebook, My Space,
Second Life etc. particularly if they are to be ‘essential’ or ‘integral’ to the curriculum and learning.

45 Electronic
46 Flexible
47 Distance
48 http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/quality-code-B3.aspx
CONTENT

This document contains three sections:

1. Benchmarks & Foci of reflections in planning, validation and review;
2. Appendix A – Explanatory text to support the above;
3. Appendix B – The University’s declared benchmark on systems reliability, security and assessment.

Section 1 Benchmarks & Foci of reflections in planning, validation and review’ highlights aspects (derived from the original QAA Code of practice s2 Precepts 1 to 8) for consideration. Curriculum design teams should consider section 1 as a companion during the journey to validation while panels should use section 1 when considering the proposed modules/programmes. They should use the tool wisely to satisfy themselves that the module/programmes are in accord with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. This can be achieved through ‘interrogation by exception’, thus focusing on the aspects of the benchmarks, as appropriate, that may not sufficiently articulated in the submitted module/programme document for validation.

Section 2 contains further detail underpinning the benchmarks.

Section 3 stipulates Edge Hill University’s declared position relating to and informed by Benchmarks 2 & 8.
Section 1 - Benchmarks & Foci for reflection

B1
Students should have access to:

- documents that set out the respective responsibilities of the awarding institution and the programme presenter for the delivery of an FDL programme or element of study;
- descriptions of the component units or modules of an FDL programme or element of study, to show the intended learning outcomes and teaching, learning and assessment methods of the unit or module;
- a clear schedule for the delivery of their study materials and for assessment of their work.

Foci for reflection:

1. In what way has the programme of study been communicated to the student?
2. What information is available to encourage the students to make informed decisions in choosing the FDL approach?
3. Can this programme be undertaken by a student who does not have access to the technology?

Response:

(What evidence is available to meet the above benchmark?
Are there gaps that need consideration?)
B2
The awarding institution, whether or not working through a programme presenter, should ensure that students can be confident that:

- any FDL programme or element offered for study has had the reliability of its delivery system tested, and that contingency plans would come into operation in the event of the failure of the designed modes of delivery;
- the delivery system of an FDL programme or element of study delivered through e-learning methods is fit for its purpose, and has an appropriate availability and life expectancy;
- the delivery of any study materials direct to students remotely through, for example, e-learning methods or correspondence, is secure and reliable, and that there is a means of confirming its safe receipt;
- study materials, whether delivered through staff of a programme presenter or through web-based or other distribution channels, meet specified expectations of the awarding institution in respect of the quality of teaching and learning support material for a programme or element of study leading to one of its awards;
- the educational aims and intended learning outcomes of a programme delivered through FDL arrangements are reviewed periodically for their continuing validity and relevance, making reference to the precepts of Section 7 of the Agency’s Code on Programme approval, monitoring and review (2000), or any successor document.

Foci for reflection:
1. How have the FDL systems been evaluated to eliminate risk of any ‘downtime’?
2. Is there full alignment with the University’s position in the event of system failure to ensure continuation of the students’ learning?
3. Has checking the security and protection of the student within the FDL systems been undertaken?
4. How has and will the quality of materials be measured in line with the organisation’s aspiration of high quality of teaching and learning?
5. How has the programme been reviewed in its development and what processes are in place for review of online teaching and learning?
6. Are there any deviations from the University’s position on this benchmark? If so, why?

Response:
This section should be read in conjunction with Appendix B – The University’s declared position in respect of benchmarks 2 & 8. This relates mainly to the VLE and further consideration may be needed if alternative technologies are being deployed.

{What evidence is available to meet the above benchmark? Are there gaps that need consideration?}
Learner support

B3
Prospective students should receive a clear and realistic explanation of the expectations placed upon them for study of the FDL programme or elements of study, and for the nature and extent of autonomous, collaborative and supported aspects of learning.

Foci for reflection:

1. How are the expectations of the mode of study communicated up front to students?
2. How are students inducted to the mode of learning? (see ‘A Guide to Effective Academic Induction’, EHU 2013)
3. What approaches are used to adequately prepare the student for autonomous learning?
4. Are the students made aware of their involvement in any collaborative learning? How?

Response:

{What evidence is available to meet the above benchmark? Are there gaps that need consideration?}

49 Available at https://go.edgehill.ac.uk/wiki/display/ufr/Inductions+and+Transitions (EHU staff login required).
Foci for reflection:

1. How is student support provided?
2. In what way is the learner’s responsibility communicated?
3. How is the institution’s responsibility mapped out for the student?

Response:

{What evidence is available to meet the above benchmark? Are there gaps that need consideration?}
B5

Students should have:

- from the outset of their study, an identified contact, either local or remote through email, telephone, fax or post, who can give them constructive feedback on academic performance and authoritative guidance on their academic progression;
- 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 of the programme;
- appropriate opportunities to give formal feedback on their experience of the programme.

Foci for reflection:

1. What arrangements are made to monitor and feedback to students on their progress? Who are the key contacts and how will this be operated?
2. How do learners feedback to the programme team about their experience?

Response:

{What evidence is available to meet the above benchmark? Are there gaps that need consideration?}
B6
The awarding institution, whether or not working through a support provider, should be able to ensure that students can be confident that:

- staff who provide support to learners on FDL programmes have appropriate skills, and receive appropriate training and development;
- support for learners, whether delivered through staff of a support provider or through web-based or other distribution channels, meets specified expectations of the awarding institution for the quality of learner support for a programme of study leading to one of its awards.

Foci for reflection:

1. Has the programme team been in receipt of appropriate training and development or has experience which demonstrates its ability to provide a FDL programme?
2. Does student support for FDL learners differ in any way from face-to-face? If so, why and what support is available? How does this benchmark with support for F2F learners in terms of equity?

Response:

{What evidence is available to meet the above benchmark? Are there gaps that need consideration?}
Assessment of students

B7
Students should have access to:

- Information on the ways in which their achievements will be judged, and the relative weighting of units, modules or elements of the programme in respect of assessment overall;
- Timely formative assessment on their academic performance to provide a basis for individual constructive feedback and guidance, and to illustrate the awarding institution’s expectations for summative assessment.

Foci for reflection:

1. Are the relevant module/programme handbook and regulations made available to students, including details of assessment and associated criteria?
2. How will information on academic performance/feedback be communicated in a timely way?
3. What opportunities for informal feedback will be included?

Response:

{What evidence is available to meet the above benchmark? Are there gaps that need consideration?}
Foci for reflection:

This section should be read in conjunction with Appendix B – The University’s declared position in respect of benchmarks 2 & 8. This relates mainly to the VLE and further consideration may be needed if alternative technologies are being deployed.

1. How is secure exchange of assessed work and feedback achieved with due respect of confidentiality?
2. How is student work authenticated?
3. Are there any deviations from the University’s position on this benchmark? If so, why?
4. How have any technology-supported systems outside of core and supported systems for exchange of student work and feedback been evaluated for security and robustness?

Response:

{What evidence is available to meet the above benchmark? Are there gaps that need consideration?}
ANNEX ‘A’ : Benchmarks (adapted from the previous QAA Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning) - Amplified version (2010)[50].

“Recent developments in learning that uses information and communications technologies (‘e-learning’), have given rise in some quarters to the belief that this approach requires an entirely separate and distinct form of quality assurance. While it is true that some technical aspects of e-modes of learning do require particular ways of meeting specific challenges, it is nonetheless also the case that most of the questions that need to be asked, and answered, about academic management are common to both e-learning and other FDL methods, and may be considered under the headings of delivery, support and assessment.”

Delivery
Benchmarks B1 and B2 are concerned with aspects of assuring the quality of the programme of study delivered to a student through an FDL arrangement. The benchmarks are couched in terms of a student’s experience of study through FDL. They do not specify who is responsible for assuring particular aspects of quality of programme delivery. It is the responsibility of the awarding institution to specify the respective responsibilities of the programme presenter, support provider and itself in assuring quality of programme delivery within the context of the awarding institution retaining ultimate responsibility for quality and standards.

Learner support
Benchmarks B3 to B6 are concerned with aspects of assuring the quality of learner support that is available to a student in an FDL arrangement, whether this is a whole programme or just an element of study. The benchmarks are couched in terms of what the student might experience. They do not specify who is responsible for assuring particular aspects of quality of learner support. It is the responsibility of the awarding institution to specify the respective responsibilities of the programme presenter, support provider and itself in assuring quality of programme delivery. In the case of programmes with elements of support through e-learning, an awarding institution may wish to make such use as it thinks appropriate of BS8426: A code of practice for e-support in e-learning systems (BSI, 2003).

Assessment of students
Benchmarks B7 and B8 are concerned with aspects of assuring the security of assessment of students’ achievements in programmes of study undertaken through FDL arrangements. They are couched in terms of what students should be able to expect in relation to assessment of academic performance in an FDL programme of element of study. In the case of programmes with elements of IT-based assessment, an awarding institution may wish to make such use as it thinks appropriate of BS7988: Code of practice for the use of information technology (IT) in the delivery of assessments (BSI, 2002), as well as BS8426: A code of practice for e-support in e-learning systems.

50 Now superseded nationally by Chapter B3 of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education – however, the original s2 precepts have been retained for internal benchmarking purposes within the University.
Benchmark B1

Students need information before they start their programme of study to enable them to make appropriate preparations for an FDL approach, and to plan the management of their time. Programme specifications, course handbooks and module or unit guides might usefully contribute to such information, as would a schedule which makes clear the sequencing and other relationships between the whole course structure, and individual modules or units. Students need to know about any scheduled opportunities for support by tutors, and about deadlines for formative and summative assessments. If information is available in a variety of formats, this will help to avoid students being prevented from accessing it through cost, disability, or lack of equipment (see also benchmark B2).

Benchmark B2

Delivery systems convey course content, and enable participant interaction and learner support. While they need to be tailored to the environment in which students are expected to work, they also need to take account of the lowest levels of technology available to students and students' special educational needs. The piloting or testing of a delivery system before its operational launch will help the presenter to gain a better understanding of the risks involved, and how to manage those risks. In an e-learning environment, it is the responsibility of the programme presenter to ensure that the system is free from contamination by viruses at the point of delivery, and has password-protected access where appropriate. Consideration should be given to how alternative forms of delivery would come into action in the event of failure of the principal delivery system, or where students are unable to meet scheduled events - students should be able to expect that the system would fail safe. A schedule in advance of the course (see benchmark B1) will, at least, enable students to identify the non-arrival of anticipated materials or events, and access to contact details will enable students to respond quickly to any failure of the principal delivery system. Students should be able to expect that their FDL study materials are subject to the same rigour of quality assurance as the awarding institution would use for any of its programmes of study.

Benchmark B3

Prospective students whose only experience of learning is through directed teaching need to be aware of the different challenges and opportunities of autonomous learning, and of their responsibilities as autonomous learners. They need clear guidance on the characteristics of learning required for their FDL studies, and on the general expectation of time commitment that they should be making. Particularly in an e-learning environment, students may need time to understand and become familiar with technologies that are new to them. They may need some introductory support, possibly involving access to on-line learning environments prior to the start of the course so that equipment and technical access can be tested and new skills practised. Consideration might be given to the need to assign an identified contact prior to the commencement of study to enable the programme presenter to ensure that the student's induction and preparation have been adequate.
Benchmark B4

Academic, technical, or pastoral support to learners in FDL programmes might include face-to-face meetings and/or on-line support. Students need to be well informed about the opportunities available to support their learning. They generally find it helpful if that information is specific about such matters as the frequency of such opportunities, and offers guidance on the anticipated response times from those who may be dealing with technical queries. They need to know about particular technical requirements for e-modes of learner support, or particular modes of required or optional attendance, such as residential classes or field trips. Students should be in a position to appreciate their own responsibilities in terms of responding to requests for information, and for participation in individual or group activities that facilitate learning. They need to know the ground rules and protocols for communication with other students and tutors, and to be in no doubt about which events and activities are compulsory and which are optional.

Benchmark B5

Clarity in the arrangements for feedback to students and guidance on their academic performance and progression is particularly important for a student studying under an FDL arrangement where the awarding institution is not also the support provider. Where it is appropriate, collaborative learning opportunities can provide a strong dimension of student support, whether through scheduled group meetings or through web-based methods. The planning into the programme of study of such inter-learner discussions would be determined by the nature of the programme, its location (on-site or off-site) and its aims and intended outcomes. Students should always have formal opportunities to feed back on the experience of their programme on a regular basis, and FDL programmes are no exception. Methods might include feedback from local learner support groups, on-line surveys and web conferencing. The methods used should be checked for fitness for purpose, recognising that there may be questions of anonymity with electronic modes which need to be taken into account. It is particularly important in an FDL arrangement, where the awarding institution is not also the programme presenter or support provider, that it is clear who is responsible for processing feedback from students, and who is responsible for telling the students about any action to be taken as a result of their feedback.

Benchmark B6

The 'appropriate skills' for staff involved in FDL arrangements include both technical competence in the use of the relevant delivery systems and pedagogic expertise in design for delivery, learner support and assessment in FDL. Students on FDL programmes should be able to expect that the staff who design their programmes have relevant technological and pedagogical expertise, and awarding institutions should be able to satisfy themselves that this is the case. Institutions might consider the merits of including aspects relevant to FDL in the development programmes that they provide in teaching and learning for newly-appointed staff, and in opportunities for the continuing professional development of established staff. Students based on an awarding body's campus can normally expect to have ready access to support services such as pastoral support, academic counselling, library and IT support, and careers guidance. An awarding institution will need to consider how it might make it possible for FDL students to access such services. It needs...
to be clear to students on FDL programmes which services are available to them from the awarding institution and from the programme presenter or support provider, and which are not. Awarding institutions should note where other sections of the Agency's Code refer to the expectation of services being available to its students, for example, as in Section 8 on Career education, information and guidance (2001).

**Benchmark B7**

Information on the methods of assessment used to test achievement of intended learning outcomes would normally be included in the programme specification, but is also likely to be supported by more detailed assessment briefs which are related to the individual units of the programme. Benchmarks 7 and 10 of Section 6 of the Code on Assessment of students (2000) set out expectations for the provision of criteria for the marking and grading of assessments, and for the rules and regulations for progression, final awards and classifications. The early issue of information on assessment methods, criteria and regulations will assist student following FDL programmes in the planning of their work. Campus-based students have opportunities for face-to-face communication with staff about academic performance. Students studying remotely through an FDL arrangement may require greater planning of opportunities for formative assessment and appropriate feedback on the outcomes of assessment more generally.

**Benchmark B8**

Where material is sent electronically, staff need to be sure that students have had clear instructions on the format and security measures that they should adopt. Administrative and ICT systems associated with the receipt and recording of assessed work should be demonstrably robust enough to withstand interception or interference. Awarding institutions need to consider how they can best guard against potential malpractice (including plagiarism) in remote assessment. In some FDL environments, there may be particular issues relating to the authentication of a student’s work, especially when assessment is conducted on-line or remotely. In such cases, awarding institutions may wish to refer to the detailed and technical guidance given in BS7988. As a starting point, students should at least be provided with a statement which explains the awarding institution’s position on the use of unfair means and the penalties which may ensue, and requires them to confirm acceptance of the terms of that statement. The methods used to record the receipt of students’ assessed work need to be considered from a fitness-for-purpose viewpoint. There should, at least, be a system to permit students to confirm that their assessed work has been received safely and within deadline. Where this system is devolved to a level below that of the programme presenter, for example, to local tutors, the awarding institution should be in a position to be confident that the system is robust. Even so, it might be wise to advise students who have to transfer their assessed work by mail or electronic means to keep a copy of their work.
ANNEX ‘B’ : The University’s declared position in respect of Benchmarks 2 & 8.

* The University, whether or not working through a programme presenter, will ensure that students can be confident that:

* Any programme or element offered for study has had the reliability of its delivery system tested, and that contingency plans would come into operation in the event of the failure of the designed modes of delivery;

  o The University has in place a Blackboard ASP Agreement which provides access to the corporate eLearning platform and its services on a 24/7, 365 basis. A reliability and availability uptime SLA of a minimum of 99.7% and a maximum of 99.9% exists against the Blackboard services. The higher rate is dependent upon Edge Hill observing best practices in their management of the system.

  o The Blackboard ASP Agreement provides the University with hosted VLE services which operate on multiple redundancy tiers for all major components, from file servers to multiple contracts with fuel suppliers for emergency generator power.

* The delivery system of a programme or element of study delivered through e-learning methods is fit for its purpose, and has an appropriate availability and life expectancy;

  o The Blackboard ASP Agreement provides the University with the guarantee of a continuously-monitored service and proactively optimises the delivery of VLE-related services. Blackboard strive to keep performance at an optimum level, and are contracted to deliver to their availability uptime SLA to a minimum of 99.7% as described above.

  o The Blackboard ASP Agreement enables the University to keep courses/modules/sections online and available as long as required (subject to the terms of the agreement). The availability and life expectancy of specific modules of learning on the VLE are determined by (non IT-related) University policies.

* The delivery of any study materials direct to students remotely through, for example, e-learning methods or correspondence, is secure and reliable, and that there is a means of confirming its safe receipt;

  o The standard features of the University's Blackboard Learn 9.1 VLE platform provide this facility. In addition, review status or checkpoints can be utilised to ensure an assessor is confident that a student has reviewed and/or received items of study material. The statistics available in Blackboard Learn 9.1 also provide assessors with the ability to generate real-time (and retrospective) visibility of delivered and accessed materials.

The awarding institution, whether or not working through a programme presenter or support provider, should ensure that students can be confident that:
* Their assessed work is properly attributed to them, particularly in cases where the assessment is conducted through remote methods that might be vulnerable to interception or other interference;

* Those with responsibility for assessment are capable of confirming that a student’s assessed work is the original work of that student only, particularly in cases where the assessment is conducted through remote methods;

* Any mechanisms, such as web-based methods or correspondence, for the transfer of their work directly to assessors, are secure and reliable, and that there is a means of proving or confirming the safe receipt of their work;

○ Students’ work for assessment will be submitted electronically and feedback delivered in typed/text format in accordance with current University policy. Students on a programme of study must have a consistent experience of tools/platforms/software for this purpose which are core provision with appropriate SLA/support from Learning and IT Services as appropriate. Change to any alternative must be undertaken in full consultation with these services and appropriate training and support provided so as to manage the transition and any risks to such consistency of experience.