

Chapter 6

Quality Assurance of Learning and Teaching

Updated October 2020

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INTRODUCTION

The calibre of academic staff and the quality of their practice are pre-conditions for the assurance of quality and standards in higher education. Within the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (March 2018)¹, the following Expectations have particular relevance to learning and teaching:

“Courses are well-designed, provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable a student’s achievement to be reliably assessed.”

“From admission through to completion, all students are provided with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education.”

These Expectations are achieved through specified **Core Practices** by which providers:

- Design and/or deliver high-quality courses
- Have sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience
- Have sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience
- Actively engage students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience.

The Government’s Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF)² has aimed to incentivise excellent teaching beyond baseline quality expectations and use this to recognise providers that can demonstrate commitment to, and success in, maximising student satisfaction, attainment and employability. The Statement of Findings from Edge Hill’s TEF Gold award of June 2017 specifically acknowledged the “professional experience of teaching staff” and a “strategic and embedded institutional culture that facilitates, recognises and rewards excellent teaching, as exemplified by the appointment of University Learning and Teaching Fellows, annual student-led staff awards and the celebration of exceptional teaching at degree ceremonies”³.

This chapter of the Quality Management Handbook is based on the premise that staff are largely responsible for improving and enhancing their own practice which for current purposes may be defined as the **teaching and academic support of students**. Nevertheless, academic managers are also accountable to the University for ensuring that the monitoring, review and development of staff, both individually and collectively, operate

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code.

² See Government White Paper ‘*Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice*’, Department for Business Innovation & Skills (May 2016)
www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-success-as-a-knowledge-economy-white-paper.

³ “*Teaching Excellence Framework Year Two: Statement of Findings - Edge Hill University*” (June 2017)
www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/teaching/tef-outcomes/#/tefoutcomes/provider/10007823.

comprehensively, consistently and effectively. Institutional monitoring and review processes⁴ evaluate the quality of the student learning experience using evidence that includes feedback from students and external examiners. Academic departments support their staff to experience and deliver good practice through engagement with staff development and appropriate externality, for example membership of academic subject and professional communities, achievement of Higher Education Academy Fellowship and applying for external examiner positions with other higher education providers. This chapter takes full account of the UK Quality Code's supporting Advice and Guidance on Learning and Teaching (November 2018)⁵. It should also be read in close association with Chapter 7 of the Quality Management Handbook, 'Quality Assurance of Assessment'⁶.

QUALITY ASSURANCE OF TEACHING STAFF

The recruitment, selection and appointment of staff including associate (part-time) tutors is governed by the University's human resources policy and procedures⁷.

Responsibilities

All staff engaged in delivering programmes of study share responsibility for maintaining academic standards and enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities. In particular, Heads of Department (HoDs) and programme leaders are accountable for developing and implementing local arrangements for assuring teaching quality for which

PVC Deans of Faculty are ultimately accountable to the Academic Board⁸ for their implementation and ensuring that staff are adequately supported. Faculties and their departments determine the most appropriate systems and processes for managing their provision, which may include designated programme and module leaders, and these arrangements are tested at validation. The following functions are typically associated with 'programme leadership':

- a) Monitoring student recruitment, retention and progression at award level.
- b) Providing programme-level guidance and support to module leaders and tutors.
- c) Ensuring appropriate communication with students including during pre-entry and induction, and guidance for their transition between academic levels/years.
- d) Ensuring programme assessment is conducted appropriately and securely, including internal and external moderation and submission of module marks to assessment boards.

⁴ For a description of the University's annual monitoring and periodic review processes see Quality Management Handbook Chapter 3 www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/files/03-annual-monitoring-periodic-review-and-internal-audit.pdf.

⁵ www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/learning-and-teaching.

⁶ www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/files/07-quality-assurance-of-assessment.pdf.

⁷ <https://go.edgehill.ac.uk/display/humanresources/Forms%2C+Policies+and+Documents> (EHU staff login required).

⁸ Via its committees for Learning and Teaching and Academic Quality Enhancement - see Quality Management Handbook Chapter 8 www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/files/08-academic-governance.pdf.

- e) Ensuring all modules within the programme have appropriate external examiner coverage.
- f) Operation of programme and module surveys, programme boards and Student-Staff Consultative Fora including course-level student representation.
- g) Overseeing arrangements for personal tutoring and Personal Development Planning.
- h) Advising students on module options, careers information and guidance and procedures for extenuating mitigating circumstances, deferral of assessment, re-assessment, interruption of studies and appeals.
- i) Point of contact for programme-related complaints.
- j) Producing programme handbooks and reviewing and updating module and programme specifications and handbooks to reflect curriculum modifications (minor and major).
- k) Contributing programme-level evaluation to departmental annual monitoring and Critical Review submissions for periodic review.

Where no single programme leader is in place and the functions of programme leadership are distributed among staff holding specific department-wide responsibilities, e.g. for teaching or the student experience, (a) to (k) should be met collectively by the programme team. Staff participation in department-level committees and workgroups enables good practice to be identified and shared, while Faculty and University committees, learning and teaching fellowships (1.6) and associated staff development activities provide vehicles for wider dissemination and exchange.

Staff qualifications and experience

The University acknowledges the strengths of teaching teams and how their collective qualifications and experience support teaching and the student experience. When considering the profile of programme teams at validation, panels will expect to see a ‘critical mass’ of individuals with appropriate academic qualifications and previous teaching experience. There is a general expectation that teaching staff are qualified to at least the same level as the qualification they are teaching, if not a level higher. In addition to academic qualifications it is expected that they will hold a teaching qualification and/or Higher Education Academy (HEA) Fellowship⁹, either through completion of the University’s Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching in Higher Education¹⁰ or the Institution’s HEA-accredited CPD Scheme (1.4). Staff may also possess relevant professional qualifications and/ or industry experience which can be a valuable supplement to teaching. For programmes delivered with academic partner organisations, Faculties via their departments are responsible for approving all individuals who teach on modules or programmes that lead to the award of Edge Hill University credit or qualifications¹¹.

⁹ The HEA is now part of ‘Advance HE’, along with the Equality Challenge Unit and Leadership Foundation, however Fellowships will retain HEA in their titles.

¹⁰ www.edgehill.ac.uk/clt/professional-development/.

¹¹ See also Quality Management Handbook Chapter 5 www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/files/05-academic-partnerships.pdf.

Research and scholarly activity

The Statement of Findings from Edge Hill's Teaching Excellence Framework Gold award of June 2017 recognised the University's 'consistent student engagement with developments at the forefront of scholarship and practice through research-informed curriculum design'¹². Staff delivering on programmes leading to Edge Hill awards are expected to maintain their knowledge and understanding of subject-related scholarship and research commensurate with the level of teaching in which they are engaged. At **FHEQ¹³ levels 4 and 5**, teachers will have relevant knowledge of, and maintain a close and professional understanding of, current developments in subject-related scholarship that inform curriculum design and directly enhance their teaching. Examples of this may include:

- Familiarity with current subject-based and/or pedagogic research literature.
- Engagement with Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) subject benchmark statements.
- Engagement with relevant professional body standards (where applicable).

At **levels 6 & 7**, teachers will have relevant knowledge of, and maintain a close and professional understanding of, current developments in subject-related research and advanced scholarship that inform curriculum design and directly enhance their teaching. While not every teacher will engage in original research, teams engaged in delivery at levels 6 & 7 should be able to evidence some scholarly outputs that generate and disseminate academic knowledge and understanding.

Examples of this are as detailed at levels 4 & 5 (above) and may additionally include:

- Membership of academic subject associations.
- Membership of professional bodies.
- Contributions to publications and/or conferences.

Induction, supervision, mentoring and development

Academic departments establish their own arrangements for the induction, supervision and mentoring of teaching staff which:

- Include the supply of handbooks and other relevant documentation.
- Provide for supervision, which may extend beyond the probationary period, of staff who are inexperienced in teaching, supporting and assessing students.
- Ensure individuals' engagement with the University's central staff induction programme.

¹² "Teaching Excellence Framework Year Two: Statement of Findings - Edge Hill University" (June 2017) www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/teaching/tef-outcomes/#/tefoutcomes/provider/10007823.

¹³ 'Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies' (QAA, 2014) www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/qualifications-frameworks.pdf?sfvrsn=170af781_16.

Managers facilitate new teachers' engagement with the University's Higher Education Academy-accredited Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching in Higher Education which also delivers HEA Fellowship (D2). For more established staff, an HEA-accredited CPD Scheme¹⁴ offers the opportunity to acquire Fellowship through demonstration of knowledge, understanding and experience mapped to the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) Dimensions of Practice¹⁵. Staff with demonstrable experience of educational leadership may seek Senior (D3) or Principal (D4) HEA Fellowship, and Edge Hill staff currently include a number of National Teaching Fellows (NTF)¹⁶. All staff have access to professional development activities including seminars and conferences hosted by the Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLT)¹⁷. Academic departments make appropriate arrangements for the induction, supervision, mentoring and development of associate (part-time) lecturers.

Teaching Observation and Peer Review

Observation of teaching is a key mechanism for ensuring that students experience the best possible opportunities to learn and succeed in their chosen subject. It provides a means to:

- Identify good practice for wider dissemination¹⁸.
- Identify poor practice and facilitate its improvement through opportunities for support, challenge and professional development.
- Identify excellent practitioners with potential for further professional development including application for internal Learning and Teaching Fellowship and National Teaching Fellowship, and solicit their input to the development of other staff through delivery of CPD seminars and contribution to staff conferences and Learning and Teaching Days.
- Provide evidence to the Office for Students (OfS)¹⁹, Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)²⁰, Ofsted²¹ and other external agencies including Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies of the University's commitment to enhance learning, teaching, assessment and other practices linked to students' learning.

Observation of teaching is invariably most productive when it is carried out in a developmental fashion by academic peers. It is also most effective in achieving the above aims if it includes all of those who teach students, which may include staff in appropriate

¹⁴ www.edgehill.ac.uk/clt/professional-development/edge-hill-university-cpd-scheme-ukpsf/.

¹⁵ www.heacademy.ac.uk/ukpsf.

¹⁶ www.heacademy.ac.uk/recognition-accreditation/national-teaching-fellowship-scheme-ntfs.

¹⁷ www.edgehill.ac.uk/clt/professional-development/.

¹⁸ In the first instance this may be through a departmental committee but may also be referred to Faculty or University committees, e.g. the Student Experience Sub-Committee (SESC) for wider internal dissemination. Opportunities for external dissemination may typically include professional associations, journal publication and conference attendance, etc.

¹⁹ www.officeforstudents.org.uk/.

²⁰ www.qaa.ac.uk/.

²¹ www.ofsted.gov.uk/.

learning support roles. It is important that observers have the necessary knowledge and skills to make sound judgements about the quality of teaching and be able to give high-quality and developmental feedback; wherever possible, teaching observation should be constructive with areas of commendation or improvement highlighted. It is not the reviewer's role to tell staff how to teach or to impose their own working methods, but rather to engage in developmental dialogue before and following observation. To make this process effective, training and guidelines should be available to all staff involved in peer review activity.

Heads of Department (HoD) are ultimately responsible for teaching quality and staff development. As a consequence, their receipt of teaching observation records is valuable both for the advancement of taught provision within the department and for the individual and collective development of staff. A core part of the HoD role is to use feedback from programme and module surveys **(2.7)**, external examiner reports²² and other consultative processes **(2.8)** to identify any problems that may need to be addressed and ensure they are acted on so as to protect students' basic entitlement to be well taught. HoDs should aim to observe the teaching of all staff at some stage over a three-year rolling period which includes the compulsory observations required as part of the probation of new staff. All staff teaching or facilitating learning, including associate lecturers and Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA), should be involved in teaching observation within the department, and Faculties should reflect on whether academic partners' own review processes are sufficient to satisfy the University of the quality of their teaching or whether additional review mechanisms are required.

Faculties have their own plans and processes for the operation of teaching observation which will address the following requirements:

- 1) A clear rubric for observation and feedback.
- 2) Provision of access to local or central training for observation.
- 3) A published timetable for observations so that the process may be monitored by managers.
- 4) Systems for capturing the outcomes of the observation and for reporting these to the HoD, with a particular focus on good practice and dissemination.
- 5) Mechanisms for reporting generic and specific professional development needs for action by the Centre for Learning and Teaching where they cannot be easily provided locally, or where collaborative support is required.
- 6) Processes for disseminating good practice.
- 7) Guidelines on supporting teachers whose teaching is unsatisfactory and how these link with staff performance review (see below).

²² See Quality Management Handbook Chapter 2 www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/files/02-external-examiners.pdf.

All Edge Hill staff are contractually obliged to participate in the University's Performance and Development Review (PRD) scheme²³ which may be informed by outputs from observed teaching. Managers and academic staff should ensure that full attention is given to the longer-term imperatives of supporting engagement with their wider academic communities (other HEIs, subject associations, professional bodies, etc.) and the research and scholarly activity that necessarily underpins their responsibilities for learning and teaching, and for curriculum development.

It should be noted that teaching observation, with this core focus on the peer review dimension, may include broader aspects of academic practice such as use of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) **(2.3)**, planning for teaching, assessment and feedback and personal tutoring, all of which make valuable contributions to the enhancement of teaching for learning.

Further advice and guidance on the development and operation of teaching review is available from the CLT on request and from Senior Learning and Teaching Fellowship Leads and Senior SOLSTICE Fellowship Leads (see below).

Learning and Teaching Fellowship and SOLSTICE Fellowship

The Learning and Teaching Fellowship and SOLSTICE Fellowship schemes²⁴ are designed to:

- Recognise and reward excellence in teaching and supporting learning.
- Promote implementation of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy²⁵.
- Contribute to enhancing the learning of students and other staff.

To this end they assist in the achievement of the six inter-related key objectives of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy:

- 1) The provision of quality learning opportunities, and guidance and support for students/ learners.
- 2) improve their teaching and learning facilitation activities.
- 3) The continued development and strengthening of learning support services and the learning infrastructure.
- 4) The monitoring and evaluation of learning and teaching to identify, support and disseminate good practice within the Institution and within the wider community.
- 5) The provision of a focus for research and development into the potential offered by new technologies.

²³ See 'Performance Review' at <https://go.edgehill.ac.uk/display/humanresources/Forms%2C+Policies+and+Documents> (EHU staff login required).

²⁴ www.edgehill.ac.uk/clt/centre-learning-teaching-clt/fellows/.

²⁵ www.edgehill.ac.uk/clt/about/strategies-and-policies/.

- 6) Enhancement of student learning through 'research-informed teaching' in relation to the formal curriculum, academic practice, and the components of the broader student experience that impact upon learning.

Fellowship activity is supported and monitored by the Centre for Learning and Teaching and there is an expectation that Fellowship Leads will support University staff development dissemination activities and the identification of development for programme design and delivery, and engage with and support CLT activities.

Categories of Fellowship

Senior Fellowship Leads are expected to follow Faculty-defined lines of development and scholarly activity during their tenure which are described in their application²⁶ and related to the foci specified below which may include reference to:

- The University Learning and Teaching Strategy and/ or Information Strategy²⁷.
- Faculty/Department/ Learning Services teaching and learning/ learning support development.
- An area/s of interest germane to their individual teaching/ learning support practice context.

Senior Fellowship Leads lead on activities to develop capacity and capability within their Faculties, identifying and contributing to providing professional development opportunities in relation to learning and teaching for individuals and groups, both formally and informally as appropriate. They also:

- Liaise with and advise Associate Deans on relevant quality management and enhancement processes, e.g. the Learning and Teaching Strategy action plan and validation, monitoring and review activities.
- developments and approaches and feed into relevant University deliberative structures (committees).
- Identify and realise opportunities to engage learners and other stakeholders in feedback and evaluation of learning and teaching activities.
- Lead and encourage support for learning and teaching research, scholarship and knowledge transfer activities including support for Fellowship project activities, dissemination of research and participation in developments related to learning and teaching as appropriate.
- Present University learning and teaching developments, research and evaluation of projects and developments at regional, national and international conferences and events concerned with learning and teaching, and publication of articles in relation to the above as appropriate.

²⁶ Applications for both Fellowship schemes are invited annually in December and considered by an academic panel.

²⁷ www.edgehill.ac.uk/clt/about/strategies-and-policies/.

- Take a lead on identification of external funding opportunities and coordination of consultancy-related knowledge transfer activities.
- Mentor Fellows, and work alongside them, to advocate and embed the *Taught Degrees Framework (2.2)* in the University through application, communication and dissemination.
- Liaise regularly with the CLT team to keep abreast of new learning and teaching practices and to ensure synergy between Faculty developments and University-wide plans.
- Represent the University at regional, national and international conferences and events concerned with teaching and learning as appropriate.
- Contribute to the Learning and Teaching Strategy Group and other institutional fora as appropriate.

External Examinerships for Edge Hill University staff

Higher education providers recognise the importance, and mutual benefit, of the work undertaken by many of their staff as external examiners for other institutions. The appointment of Edge Hill University staff as external examiners helps maintain HE sector standards and promote quality enhancement, both for the appointing institution and for the University which benefits from staff's exposure to, and evaluation of, wider sector practice. Edge Hill University encourages such opportunities and provides specific development²⁸ for staff seeking external examiner positions.

QUALITY ASSURANCE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

Learning and teaching strategies

The University's programme approval (validation) process considers the type and range of learning activities provided for students. Module Specifications, which inform the production of award-level Programme Specifications, record the proportion of time spent in the following learning activities by year/ stage of a programme:

- **Scheduled Learning and Teaching activities**

Lecture; Seminar; Tutorial; Project Supervision, including dissertation; Demonstration; Practical classes & workshops; Supervised time in studio (lab)/ workshop; Synchronous online learning activities.

- **Online teaching (asynchronous)**

Asynchronous tutorial discussions, including feedback on formative assessment; Tutor-facilitated collaborative or individual projects, e.g. wikis, padlets, blogs and e-portfolios; Tutor-facilitated discussion boards.

²⁸ See also www.edgehill.ac.uk/aqdu/external-examiners/.

- **External visits and Work-Based Learning**²⁹

External visits; fieldwork; Work-Based Learning; placements.

- **Guided Independent Study**

Course teams justify the range and balance of learning and teaching activities in the context of inclusive learning opportunities (2.4). Information on learning activities collected at validation also supports the production of course publicity, e.g. print and online prospectus, and the compilation of external data returns which inform the University's submission for Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) assessment³⁰.

The Taught Degrees Framework

Edge Hill's Taught Degrees Framework comprises guiding principles for the design, approval and review of all undergraduate and taught postgraduate awards validated by the University. Working within the credit structures defined by the Academic Regulations³¹, the Framework is essentially enabling in that it signposts available guidance and best practice for effective curriculum design; but also constraining in so far as course teams are required to engage with its themes ('lenses') and respond to essential questions about teaching and learning, assessment and student support.

The Taught Degrees Framework 'lenses':

- 1) Induction and Transition
- 2) Learning, Teaching and Assessment
- 3) Graduate Attributes, Employability and Work-Related/Work-Based Learning
- 4) Education for Personal Development and Enhancement
- 5) Citizenship and Awareness of Global Perspectives

Associated with these is a wiki-based repository³² of guidance and supporting materials including a good practice 'blog' which are available to all Edge Hill University staff. Institutional validation and review panels explore the fitness-for-purpose and variety of programme-level strategies for teaching (and assessment³³) and student support.

²⁹ For specific guidance on the design, delivery and support of Work-Based Learning including practice-based learning and work placements, see Quality Management Handbook Chapter 5 at www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/files/05-academic-partnerships.pdf.

³⁰ See also Quality Management Handbook Chapter 1 at www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/files/01-the-quality-strategy-management-of-quality-and-standards.pdf.

³¹ www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/collection/academic-regulations/.

³² www.edgehill.ac.uk/clt/key-areas-of-activity/taught-degrees-framework/.

³³ See Quality Management Handbook Chapter 7 at www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/files/07-quality-assurance-of-assessment.pdf.

Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL)

Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL), sometimes referred to as 'e-learning', involves the use of electronic media, educational technology and information and communication technologies (ICT) in delivering academic programmes of study. TEL may be used to support flexible (blended³⁴ and distance) learning or classroom-based learning and can be tutor-led and synchronous, or learner-paced and asynchronous. The standard agenda for programme approval³⁵ includes discussion of how TEL will be used to support learning in any of these modes – validation panels will consider:

- The range of technologies to be used, and their application to learning.
- The systems by which TEL will be made available – typically via the Learning Edge Blackboard Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)³⁶ - and their fitness-for-purpose, reliability, accessibility and security with appropriate contingency for technical failure.
- 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.

Staff of the Learning Technology Development³⁷ team of Learning Services provide advice and support on how technology can best support or enhance curriculum development and delivery including inclusive digital practices.

The Learning Edge VLE Baseline

The University's original 'VLE Baseline' was introduced in 2008 as a strategy to provide a consistent student experience within each programme/department and drive greater and more consistent use of the Learning Edge VLE. Each Faculty Learning and Teaching

³⁴ **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.

³⁵ Available at <https://go.edgehill.ac.uk/display/aqdu/Template+Documents> (EHU staff login required).

³⁶ Where the University's programmes are delivered by or with academic partners, validation panels may consider the Virtual Learning Environments of both organisations.

³⁷ <https://go.edgehill.ac.uk/display/ls/Learning+Technology+Development> (EHU staff login required).

Committee agreed its own mandatory baseline, however in the intervening years these were extended informally in response to improved VLE functionality, and formally via policy decisions on the electronic submission of coursework and provision of 'typed' feedback. The mandatory baseline (minimum expectation) for use of the VLE was updated in 2015 to take account of current policy and practice and introduced two additional levels, 'Baseline+' and '++'. The below 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 guidance 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.

Learning Edge Baseline and Baseline+ / ++ (updated December 2015)

Category	Baseline	Baseline+ (Indicative)	Baseline++ (Indicative)
Administration and Orientation	Programme and/or Module handbook (depending on area) (PDF format for mobile and operating system accessibility– see also Resources below) Link to timetables	Staff contact details including photograph, availability, contact information Use Calendar tool	Tutors talking head video introductions ³⁸
Structure and Navigation	Page items presented in a logical structure and sequence (usually chronological)	Faculty, Departmental or Programme templates used for consistency.	Students guided through course by timed release of content

³⁸ For example, could be self-produced by webcam or commissioned from Learning Services Media Development team.

Category	Baseline	Baseline+ (Indicative)	Baseline++ (Indicative)
	Links checked to ensure still live. Broken links updated or removed		
Communication	Announcements tool for urgent information updates e.g. room changes, cancellations (one way)	Q&A Discussion fora provided for 2-way communication. Purpose of fora and how to engage is provided.	News panel displayed on VLE home page owned and managed by Faculty or Department. Provides local, non-urgent information ³⁹
Resources	Preparatory materials available up to 1 week before session. Presentation slides, notes, hand-outs available via the VLE within 1 week of session. Cross-platform and mobile-accessible PDF format used unless documents need to be accessed for editing. Support learners with additional requirements by making alternative resources i.e. transcripts for videos (if used) and use of colour	Compress files to minimise file size and aid students viewing on mobile devices. File size and type displayed alongside the filename e.g. Introduction to infection control 34MB PDF 68KB Teaching content in presentation software, e.g. PowerPoint enhanced by multimedia/ narration/ quiz functionality e.g. via iSpring plugin. Renders on any device (and mobile accessible)	Bespoke content that requires specialist skills e.g. simulations, games, videos ⁴² , interactive resources Videos, links, images and texts display well on mobile devices including smartphones Activities specifically designed to harness mobile device features (e.g. camera, apps) to aid 'anytime, anyplace learning'

³⁹ Part of Learning Services LTD development activity, working with Faculties/ Departments. Will move to baseline+, then baseline once rolled out.

⁴² Role of LS Media Development – providers of video content that academics cannot be expected to build for themselves.

Category	Baseline	Baseline+ (Indicative)	Baseline++ (Indicative)
	<p>contrast, font and text size in content⁴⁰</p> <p>Faculty or Departmental library resources available via a tab in VLE⁴¹</p>	<p>Allow students to revisit lectures using lecture capture streamed via the VLE</p> <p>Use webcam or personal screen/desktop capture software to produce audio/video e.g. to highlight key concepts to students in any given topic</p> <p>Embed links to external online resources</p>	
Assessment and Feedback	<p>Outline and dates for each assessment provided along with instructions, marking criteria, coversheets</p> <p>Assignment submission drop boxes (where appropriate). Students provided with clear instructions on how to submit electronic documents (Blackboard Assignment,</p>	<p>Student work marked in digital format (either online or offline)</p> <p>Student mark, return of work and feedback released via the use of the My Grades feature in the VLE</p>	Use of Blackboard tests/quizzes for formative assessment

⁴⁰ Assistive Technologies: www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/technology-and-tools-for-online-learning/assistive-technologies.

⁴¹ Managed by Learning Services.

Category	Baseline	Baseline+ (Indicative)	Baseline++ (Indicative)
	<p>Turnitin) and opportunity to rehearse use</p> <p>Links to guides and where to go for help in the event of a problem submitting work</p>		
Student Participation and Engagement		<p>Monitor student use of courses in the VLE using the Course Reports tool and Performance Dashboard</p> <p>Use the Retention Centre to track student engagement and identify those at risk</p> <p>Students share and/or build resources using online tools such as blogs, wikis</p> <p>Students encouraged to complete their Blackboard profiles to improve visibility within VLE</p> <p>Student end of module evaluations use Bristol Online Surveys or Blackboard survey</p>	<p>Using the Retention Centre, identify students where lack of engagement with the VLE is giving a cause for concern</p> <p>Blackboard Collaborate used to deliver webinars or support to students</p> <p>Use of Collaborate or multimedia presentations to deliver a 'flipped classroom' approach</p> <p>Students encouraged to use the cloud social spaces within Blackboard for student-owned discussion and to link to peers/practitioners in other institutions both nationally and globally</p> <p>Use of polling tools or an anonymous discussion forum in the VLE to obtain</p>

Category	Baseline	Baseline+ (Indicative)	Baseline++ (Indicative)
		tool to collect and collate feedback.	snapshots of student opinion.
Personal/Professional Development Portfolio		Students use tools e.g. Campus Pack blogs and wikis for reflection on learning or practice and portfolio building.	Campus Pack portfolio assessed via the Blackboard Grade Centre.

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 ‘Framework for the Quality Assurance of Technology Enhanced Learning’*⁴³ during programme development, approval 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).

When reviewing Applications for Development Consent⁴⁴ for new programmes, the Academic Planning Committee (APC)⁴⁵ considers whether TEL is supplemental to classroom-based teaching or constitutes an essential, integral component 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. Where the latter applies, APC may require a SOLSTICE Fellowship Lead⁴⁶ to join the validation panel.

Although new modules do not require APC development consent, those intended for delivery as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) will require initial notification to APC before Faculty approval may proceed.

Inclusive programme design

Teaching and learning activities are influenced by University policies and UK legislation⁴⁷ related to Equality and Disability. Faculties seek to make their programmes accessible and inclusive at the point of design, devising learning and assessment activities that do not

⁴³ See Appendix “*Framework for Quality Assurance of the ‘E’, ‘F’ and ‘D’ in Technology Enhanced Learning*”, Schofield, M. & Smith B., Edge Hill University (updated October 2014).

⁴⁴ See Quality Management Handbook Chapter 4 www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/files/04-programme-and-module-approval-and-modification.pdf.

⁴⁵ See Quality Management Handbook Chapter 8 www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/files/08-academic-governance.pdf.

⁴⁶ www.edgehill.ac.uk/solstice/.

⁴⁷ Equality Act (EQA) 2010 www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents.

knowingly disadvantage or exclude any identifiable student group. Course designers take steps to identify and resolve any barriers and biases in respect of a proposed programme's content, learning activities and learning outcomes, and assessment strategy⁴⁸; for example, consideration may be given to how students with any form of sensory impairment will access learning materials resulting in adaptations⁴⁹ to the materials or how and when they are made available. A range of teaching and assessment methods also helps accommodate students' varying learning styles and preferences.

Programme approval (validation) panels judge the extent to which inclusion has been considered within the curriculum design process in relation to student characteristics that may include:

- Age, e.g. school-leaver or mature returner to study
- Gender, including sexual orientation and gender-identification
- Ethnicity, including faith or belief systems and cultural values
- Socio-economic background, including first-time HE participation
- Entry qualifications, e.g. A-level, BTEC, Access/ Fastrack; no formal qualifications/ RPEL
- Disability and/ or specific learning difficulties.

Typical questions for course designers and validation panels may include:

- 1) Does the syllabus and delivery of the programme or module engage the socio-cultural diversity of students to allow and promote different learning styles, abilities, and needs?
- 2) Does the programme or module structure support and enhance access for all students?
- 3) Does the programme or module incorporate alternate modes of delivery?
- 4) Are learning materials responsive to the diversity of the students, accessible and designed to support different learning styles?
- 5) Are a variety of assessment options available to enable students to engage with different kinds of learning and receive feedback to support their attainment?
- 6) Are recordings of lectures or other participatory technologies made available to students during or after a session?
- 7) Are specialist facilities and equipment available and appropriate to enable all students to participate successfully in the programme or module?
- 8) Where external activities and visits are an integral and required part of the programme or module, how is their availability and accessibility to students assured?

⁴⁸ See also Quality Management Handbook Chapter 7 www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/files/07-quality-assurance-of-assessment.pdf.

⁴⁹ For Reasonable Adjustments to assessment, see QMH Chapter 7 (above).

Programme information: programme and module handbooks

Departments ensure the accessibility of programme and module information which may be disseminated via handbooks, noticeboards and the *Learning Edge* Blackboard Virtual Learning Environment. It is important that students can access information easily and do not feel overwhelmed by it, and in this regard departments will ensure that it is conveyed in a proportionate and timely manner. While programme teams bespoke their information to the needs of particular cohorts, the University has produced guidelines⁵⁰ that describe the standard information requirement for module and programme handbooks. Programme and/or module handbooks will also contain the name, position and home institution of the relevant external examiner(s)⁵¹.

Programme specifications provide the definitive record of each validated programme and are updated to reflect programme and module changes. While designed principally as validation documents, programme specifications are also used to inform the production of programme handbooks that are targeted exclusively on the student audience.

Programme monitoring

In addition to the annual monitoring and periodic review of academic departments⁵², Faculties ensure the operation of programme-level monitoring⁵³ of student learning opportunities based on the following considerations:

- The value of informal as well as formal mechanisms for eliciting the views of learners.
- Use of programme and module surveys (see below).
- Use of module tutor reports, informed by student feedback and containing evaluation of module performance data.
- The role of Programme Boards and Student-Staff Consultative Fora (SSCFs) in considering the outputs from monitoring and review processes and external examiner reports (see below).
- The need to tailor the collection of feedback to the mode of study, needs and circumstances of particular types of learner, notably part-time students and those engaged in distance learning programmes.

⁵⁰ See 'Guidelines for Programme and Module Handbooks' at www.edgehill.ac.uk/clt/files/2012/02/ProgrammeModuleHandbooksGuidelines-Revised-12.pdf.

⁵¹ Unless an alternative medium is used, e.g. the Learning Edge Virtual Learning Environment – see also QMH Chapter 2.

⁵² See QMH Chapter 3.

⁵³ See QMH Chapter 1, 'Faculty Academic Quality Statements'.

Programme and module surveys

Students⁵⁴ complete a short **Student Pulse Survey** at the middle and end of each semester which enables academic departments to consider issues raised by them at programme and module level. Surveys are open for a period of one to two weeks, followed by departmental action planning and feedback to students within a total of four weeks. Alternative surveys operate in some areas for students who are currently out on practice placements. Each academic department nominates a Feedback Ambassador who can champion all aspects of student feedback, supporting their area to utilise best practice approaches and be a local point of contact with the Student Experience Team, which:

- Coordinates the institutional approach to Student Pulse Surveys.
- Leads on communications to students and staff (including Institutional campaigns and local support), as follows:
 - 'Your Voice Counts' (raising awareness of opportunities to feed back, and commitment to enhancing the student experience from student feedback);
 - 'You Said, We Listened' (demonstrating to students how feedback has enhanced the student experience);
- Resource packs for academic departments.
- Disseminates the survey to students.
- Provides technical support and training on the survey system (Qualtrics).
- Identifies Institutional issues, trends and progress.
- Leads on Institution-level action planning.
- Facilitates a 'Feedback Forum', supporting Feedback Ambassadors in their roles.
- Evaluates the impact of this approach.

Heads of Department receive survey results via the platform dashboard and share them with programme and module leaders, facilitating department-level consideration of issues, quality assuring action plans and escalating Institutional issues to the Student Experience Team. Programme Leaders identify teaching sessions for survey completion and close the feedback loop to students – 'You Said, We Listened' - using template emails, posters and PowerPoint slides provided by the Student Experience Team. Feedback Ambassadors work with programme leaders and other colleagues, leading on 'You Said, We Listened' and attending the Feedback Forum to share ideas, experiences and good practice.

Student representation, Programme Boards and Student-Staff Consultative Fora

Student representatives are essential to effective communication between staff and students on programme-related matters. Edge Hill University's student representation scheme is managed by the Students' Union (SU)⁵⁵ and is central to promoting academic

⁵⁴ Undergraduate degree students only. Students of postgraduate taught programmes undertake separate departmental module evaluation surveys.

⁵⁵ For more information see www.edgehillsu.org.uk/academicreps.

responsibility within the student community, providing a channel for the student voice to be heard and encouraging discussion between students and academic and professional services staff who work in partnership to maintain and enhance programme quality. Course-level academic representatives are elected at the start of the academic year and the SU provides training and networking opportunities that enable them to meet and share their experiences. In addition to attending Programme Boards and Student-Staff Consultative Fora (SSCFs)⁵⁶, academic student representatives have the opportunity to become involved in wider consultation mechanisms, e.g. as Faculty student representatives and in other Institutional working groups, and develop transferable skills in communication, negotiation and advocacy that are useful to and valued by employers. In order to secure comprehensive and effective student representation at course level, departments:

- (In conjunction with the SU) Promote the value of representation to students, encouraging and facilitating the election of student representatives.
- (In conjunction with the SU) Prepare and brief student representatives for their participation in SSCFs and Programme Boards, scheduling meetings to maximise their attendance and enabling them to contribute to and shape agendas.
- Include the notes of SSCF meetings as a standing item on the agendas of Programme Boards.
- Communicate the decisions (minutes) of SSCFs and Programme Boards to student representatives and facilitate their ability to communicate with their peers, e.g. through reserved time in classes or via department noticeboards, group email or the *Learning Edge* Blackboard Virtual Learning Environment.

Students' Union sabbatical officers participate in periodic review panels which meet with a representative selection of students⁵⁷. Sabbatical officers are also members of several Institution-level committees including the Academic Board⁵⁸.

⁵⁶ See Quality Management Handbook Chapter 8 www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/files/08-academic-governance.pdf.

⁵⁷ See Quality Management Handbook Chapter 3 www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/files/03-annual-monitoring-periodic-review-and-internal-audit.pdf.

⁵⁸ See Quality Management Handbook Chapter 8 www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/files/08-academic-governance.pdf.

APPENDIX: Framework for Quality Assurance of the ‘E’⁵⁹, ‘F’⁶⁰ and ‘D’⁶¹ in Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) (updated October 2014)

AIMS

- To support colleagues in designing TEL processes with reference to the original *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* (QAA, 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 particularly if they are to be ‘essential’ or ‘integral’ to the curriculum and learning.

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.

⁵⁹ Electronic

⁶⁰ Flexible

⁶¹ Distance

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. 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

Benchmark 1 (B1)	Foci for Reflection	Response
<p>Students should have access to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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? 	<p>What evidence is available to meet the above benchmark?</p> <p>Are there gaps that need consideration?</p>

Benchmark 2 (B2)	Foci for Reflection	Response
<p>The awarding Institution, whether or not working through a programme presenter, should ensure that students can be confident that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 and receipt; • Study material, whether delivered through staff of a programme presenter or through web-based or other distribution channels, meet specified expectation 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. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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? 	<p>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.</p> <p><i>{What evidence is available to meet the above benchmark? Are there gaps that need consideration?}</i></p>

Learner Support

Benchmark 3 (B3)	Foci for reflection	Response
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 aspect of learning.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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 2013⁶²) 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? 	<p>What evidence is available to meet the above benchmark? Are there gaps that need consideration?</p>

⁶² Available at

<https://go.edgehill.ac.uk/display/ufr/Induction+and+Transition+EHU+Documents+and+Guidance> (EHU staff login required).

Benchmark 4 (B4)	Foci for reflection	Response
<p>Students should have access to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A schedule for any learner support available to them through timetabled activities, for example tutorial session or web-based conferences; • Clear and up to date information about the learning support available to them locally and remotely for their FDL programme or elements of study; • Documents that set out their own responsibilities as learner, and the commitments of the awarding institution and the support provider (if appropriate) for the support of an FDL programme or element of study. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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? 	<p>What evidence is available to meet the above benchmark? Are there gaps that need consideration?</p>

Benchmark 5 (B5)	Foci for reflection	Response
<p>Students should have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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? 	<p>What evidence is available to meet the above benchmark? Are there gaps that need consideration?</p>

Benchmark 6 (B6)	Foci for reflection	Response
<p>The awarding institution, whether or not working through a support provider, should be able to ensure that students can be confident that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 a programme of study leading to one of its awards. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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? 	<p>What evidence is available to meet the above benchmark? Are there gaps that need consideration?</p>

Assessment of students

Benchmark 7 (B7)	Foci for reflection	Response
<p>Students should have access to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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? 	<p>What evidence is available to meet the above benchmark? Are there gaps that need consideration?</p>

Benchmark 8 (B8)	Foci for reflection	Response
<p>The awarding institution, whether or not working through a programme presenter or support provider, should ensure that students can be confident that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their assessment 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. 	<p>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.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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? 	<p>What evidence is available to meet the above benchmark? Are there gaps that need consideration?</p>

ANNEX 'A': Benchmarks (adapted from the original *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)*):

"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*.

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;
- 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.

- 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;

- 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.
- 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;

- 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.