4.3 Approval and programme validation processes

Approval and validation processes for blended learning programmes including online learning modules are appropriate and fit-for-purpose.

Procedures in place include:

4.3.1 A robust programme development process designed for online learning that includes explicit consideration of, for example:

- Staff qualifications and experience in online learning.

- The use to be made of external consultants and experts in online provision, including in critical review and appraisal of draft learning resources.

- Arrangements for the induction and continuing professional development (CPD) of staff involved in a) the development and support of online resources; b) online teaching, where such experience is lacking; c) support services for learners.

- Testing of delivery mechanisms for online modules or parts of modules. For example, confirming that (where appropriate) it is possible to access learning on a private computer or on a mobile device or other as appropriate.

4.3.2 Processes to establish sustainable timescales and planning for resources including:

- Early confirmation of staffing resources. If the programme is dependent on local tutors for support, confirmation will need to be provided at an early stage to determine a demonstrable local supply of appropriate staff, and the criteria for their appointment.

- Timescale for subsequent development and approval of online sections and associated learning resources at the various levels in the programme, and the identification of the external assessors who are involved (if relevant). The timescale is influenced by factors such as pre-requisites, progression rules, applicable legal or regulatory body requirements, and programme flexibility.

- Programmes are fully designed before being offered to learners.

4.3.3 Robust arrangements for the quality assurance of learning resources, the learning environment and other learning resources. Depending on the blend of learning involved, there is a varying focus on the effectiveness and quality of the learning experience. For example, where appropriate, equal QA scrutiny is focussed on learner engagement with the learning resources and on their engagement with teaching staff. The nature of the learning materials and resources will also be different for online learners.

4.3.4 Processes that highlight the availability and timeliness of feedback to learners. In online modules this is likely to be achieved virtually, thus benchmarks and expectations will be different. In many remote contexts, learners will rely primarily on electronic learning resources.

4.3.5 Processes for learner records are sufficient and accurately maintained, and up-to-date learner records are available for monitoring progression and achievement. They will facilitate timely intervention for online learners who may be struggling. Where learning opportunities are flexible and allow learners to stop and start the programme, the student record arrangements are able to support the level and nature of flexibility permitted.

4.3.6 Privacy laws on data protection are appropriate for all aspects of online provision. Learner concerns about the confidentiality of learner records are respected. For example, protocols will be necessary to manage and archive formal or informal learning conversations between learners or between learners and teaching staff, as appropriate. Learners are made aware of the regulations:

- that will provide them with a unique learner identity to be used by the provider;

- that protect learners and indicate their own electronic trail or digital persona.

4.3.7 Staff induction processes for staff employed to support or assess learners are in place. Staff are appropriately inducted and trained for their role in online learning. There may be aspects of the assessment process that are distinctive (or at least more prominent than in a face-to-face context) for online learning. For example, it is commonplace in online learning for assessors to assess, grade or mark learner assessment:

- where assignments have been set by someone else

- submitted and returned electronically

- from learners they have only met face-to-face on a few occasions throughout the academic year

4.3.8 Moderation processes are in place to ensure consistency and share good practice where more than one tutor is employed to support or assess more than one group of learners. Documentation of best practice examples and exchange of information among all staff is important where there is a growing knowledge base, a growing availability of additional open access resources and constant demands to update ICT skills. Provider support through structured networking is in place to facilitate this.