Distance Learning Validation Guidance Notes 2021/22

Contents

Overview

Distance learning provision at DMU

Distance learning programmes at DMU is defined as a mode of education that takes place primarily within an online environment providing students the flexibility where learning takes place. A core aspect of the provision is providing opportunities for learning where students have some flexibility with the pace and the curricula studied. Aimed at providing accessible learning opportunities, programmes are designed to attract students from diverse backgrounds through different entry routes. This may include taught doctorate programmes as well as undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes.

Currently, at DMU, distance learning is distinguished from Covid-19 response teaching in that, although teaching may be conducted remotely, students have specifically chosen the distance learning mode of study, and courses are designed with this is mind.

What does it entail?

Developing a distance learning programme involves many of the same considerations as campus-based courses in terms of ensuring that a programme is financially viable, programmes and curricula are well thought-through and appropriately structured, and that all of the necessary resources are in place. The planning of the programme and the resources required to deliver this (library, software, sector engagement) are key parts of developing a distance learning programme. This is to ensure all key elements have been incorporated into the business case and will result in a better learning experience in the long term.

A key difference between distance learning and campus-based teaching is that distance learning programmes require more activity to plan, design and develop the programme and associated learning activities presented within the learning materials. Each module will consist of a structured set of learning materials which adhere to course design principles, and will be supplemented with high quality digital resources, presented within the Virtual Learning Environment. Programme and module leaders will need to consider how they will support distance learners throughout the whole student experience, from induction to graduation, including access to ensuring they have the same access to academic and pastoral support as student studying on campus.

A diagram of the validation for DL programmes is included in Appendix A.

The Distance Learning Unit

The Distance Learning Unit will work with programme teams throughout the development of the programme, offering support at each stage, both before and after validation.

- Before validation
  The Distance Learning Unit will:
  o Provide support for the 'proposition' of your new programme to meet the student demand/demographic in line with the DL strategy.
  o Support the design of your programme, through a programme design workshop to establish key features and considerations of the student experience.
  o Support you in developing a marketing and recruitment plan and promotional materials for the programme.

- After validation
  The Distance Learning Unit will:
  o Continue to work with programme teams to plan, design and develop module content (including teaching, assessment and student support) through a flipped approach using a training module, and a series of meetings and workshops.

- Support teams to create digital media content, including videos, audio, imagery, diagrams, infographics etc.
- Support with compliance aspects of DL delivery.
- Support the development of online materials that use the online tools available within the DL Unit to deliver your programme.
- Create module shells and upload content to the virtual learning environment.
- Support the set-up of module shells and upload content to the virtual learning environment and prepare the module for first delivery.
- Signpost to relevant training to support programme teams with the development and delivery of their programme.
- Support the marketing and recruitment of the programme.
- Invite team members to join Distance Learning networks, and community of practice (e.g. Distance Learning Committee Working group.
- Support teams in develop and best practices for online delivery and support with innovation project in conjunction with other programme teams.

Proposing a new programme or course

Course proposals can be discussed initially with faculty DL representatives and Associate Dean Academics who are members of the Distance Learning Committee and will discuss in terms of alignment with faculty plans for distance learning. Alternatively, to find out more about distance learning at DMU contact the Head of Distance Learning Unit Carmen.Miles@dmu.ac.uk . To progress the new programme idea an initial meeting will be set up with the programme lead/team to discuss how the unit supports the planning, development and delivery of the programme.

Validation of distance learning programmes

The validation of distance learning programmes will take place according to the guidance provided in the Department of Academic Quality (DAQ) Guide to Validation. However, some different and additional requirements are outlined below.

Timescales for distance learning validation

Fast-tracks

The option to fast-track a new programme proposal to validation can be used where there is already a face to face programme in place that is then adapted for distance learning delivery.

Development timescales

Approval to proceed to validation should be gained by the relevant faculty and university committees approximately 9-12 months before the proposed start date.

Start dates of programmes will be agreed between the faculty and the Head of Distance Learning based on the launch dates, and the availability and capacity of faculty and Distance Learning Unit colleagues.

Documentary requirements for distance learning validation

Standard documentation

The standard documentation will be as outlined in the DAQ Guide to Validation and will be different depending on the type of validation event. For example, the documentary requirements for the revalidation of an existing programme into a distance learning format will be different from the requirements of validating an entirely new programme. Examples of completed validation documentation will be shared on the DAQ website.

Outputs from the programme design to be included in the validation documentation:

- Programme structure: How the programme will be structured and presented for distance learning students in terms of numbers of modules, options, credits, pre-requisites, running order
- Programme 'calendar': The proposed duration of modules and submission points
- Student experience: How the needs of distance learners been considered in the design of teaching, learning, assessment and feedback.
- Student support: How students will be supported to develop academic and study skills appropriate to the programme.
  Participation and engagement: How student engagement with the programme and learning will be monitored and supported, opportunities for engagement with the programme and wider university community be integrated into the programme, how student engagement will be monitored between assignment submissions.
- Access to wider university services: How academic and pastoral support opportunities will be made available.

Validation panel requirements

Distance Learning Unit representation

In addition to the standard validation panel constitution as outlined in the DAQ Guide to Validation, a representative from the Distance Learning Unit will sit on the validation panel. The role of the DL representative is to consider the pedagogic approach of the programme and the DL Unit members ability to support the development of the programme as articulated within the documentation against the proposed timescales.

External panel member

Ideally the external member of the validation panel will have experience of developing and delivering distance learning provision, although it is recognised that this will not always be possible.

Appendix A:

Overview of the validation process for a Distance Learning programme. If at any stage of the process a programme proposal is not approved, documents should be reviewed and re-presented to the relevant committee. This guidance should be read in conjunction with the Guide to Validation.

The Green boxes indicate key moments of interaction with the Distance Learning Team.

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│                      Programme idea                          │
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                              ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│              Contact the Distance Learning Unit              │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│           Programme Design workshop with the DL  Unit        │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                              ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Programme proposal form and financial viability statement   │
│                      forwarded to FEC                        │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                              ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Proposal form and financial viability statement forwarded   │
│         to PMB and DARC (as per Guide to Validation)         │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                              ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Proposal form and financial viability statement referred    │
│                         to TPMC                              │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                              ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│       APQ liases with DAQ to schedule validation event       │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Programme team complete validation paperwork and forwards   │
│                         to APQ                               │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                              ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                      Validation event                        │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Programme team continues to work with DL Unit on creation   │
│  of induction materials, learning materials and preparing    │
│                  the programme for launch                    │
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