

**UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM**

**GUIDANCE NOTE ON ALTERNATIVE MODES OF DELIVERY PROGRAMMES**

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## **1. Introduction**

### Definitions

- 1.1 Alternative Modes of Delivery (AMD) programmes are programmes of study which are not delivered on campus and/or face-to-face; they have little or no requirement for registered students to attend the University of Birmingham campus in order to study for, or take part in, assessment for University credit.
- 1.2 AMD programmes typically include:
- (a) Distance Learning programmes
  - (b) Flying Faculty programmes
  - (c) Blended Learning programmes

### Scope

- 1.3 This Guidance Note applies to all teaching and learning that bears credit only, and therefore does not cover materials made available by 'open access'.
- 1.4 This Guidance Note does not apply to Placement Learning, nor Split Location Study, for which there are separate definitions and Codes of Practice (<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/legal/placementlearning.pdf>), (<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/legal/split-location-postgraduate-study.pdf>)

## **2. Approval**

- 2.1 The University, through the Programme Approval Review Committee, is responsible for approving new undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes, and postgraduate research programmes with taught elements, including those which are to be delivered by AMD. College Education Committees, or their equivalents, are responsible for approving AMD programme elements.
- 2.2 The University Programme Approval Review Committee will consider proposals as follows:
- (a) New taught AMD programmes: Schools are required to complete the New Programme Approval process, which includes the submission of a Plan to Develop a New Programme form, followed by a Programme Proposal and Programme Specification. The AMD Checklist must also be completed and submitted to the Committee along with the New Programme Proposal.
  - (b) Delivering an existing campus-based taught programme as an AMD programme: Schools should submit a New Programme Proposal and include the AMD Checklist.
- 2.3 Proposals for research-only programmes must be reviewed and agreed by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) and the Director of the Graduate School before submission to University Programme Approval Review Committee for approval.

- 2.4 When seeking approval for AMD programmes, or programme elements, Schools are required to address the full resource requirements for design and delivery, to ensure that full costings have been undertaken and that appropriate staff and resources are available so that the programme or programme elements run smoothly.
- 2.5 Where the programme will be supported or delivered by a collaborative organisation, agreement in principle must first be gained from the Collaborative Provision Committee. Once full approval has been gained a legal agreement must be drafted and signed by all parties before commencement of the programme (see section 9 below).
- 2.6 Schools must contact the relevant sections of Corporate Services at the earliest opportunity to discuss any elements of the programme which might not fit with the usual University administration cycle. This might include discussion with Strategic Planning where a programme start date is after the census date, or where there are multiple cohorts per year, or discussion with Student Records or Graduate School where student processing might differ from the standard pattern.

### **3. Academic Requirements**

#### Admission

- 3.1 All admissions to the University will be managed in line with the Code of Practice on Admission of Students. Academic and English Language requirements for entry to a programme are set by the School and scrutinised by Admissions at the point of application. When setting these requirements Schools are advised to consult with Admissions, and consider how these requirements might vary from similar campus-based programmes, particularly due to the limited English Language support available to Distance Learning students.
- 3.2 Any additional admission requirements which are set by the School for either taught or research students, are subject to scrutiny by the School at the point of application. Additional admission requirements, such as evidence of ability to study independently, are particularly important for postgraduate researchers, for whom a 'Checklist to Accompany an Admission Decision Form' must be completed and approved by the supervisor and Head of School prior to any admission offer letter being sent to the applicant. The form must include detail of how the applicant has demonstrated:
  - (a) evidence of the ability to study and undertake research independently;
  - (b) a minimum technological requirement, e.g. the proficient use of electronic conferencing facilities;
  - (c) the suitability of the chosen residency location for research; and
  - (d) the reasons for AMD delivery rather than the standard mode of study.

#### Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Support

- 3.3 In the development of AMD programmes, Schools should ensure that the intended aims of the programme can be achieved by the different mode, and that the relevant learning outcomes of taught elements can be adequately assessed.

- 3.4 The Information Classification Standard is used within the University, which may result in certain resources having limited online availability, i.e. because they are Confidential or Restricted. Schools will ensure that any information they intend Students on AMD programmes to access remotely, can indeed be accessed in this way.
- 3.5 Thought should also be given to other learning opportunities that could be afforded to students on AMD programmes, for example use of social media to bring together student groups, or utilisation of libraries and other resources local to the student.
- 3.6 Schools will ensure that all students on AMD programmes have an identified personal tutor and welfare tutor.
- 3.7 Schools will also provide guidance on how the Codes of Practice on Extenuating Circumstances, Reasonable Adjustments and Student Attendance and Reasonable Diligence will operate in the case of students on AMD programmes.

#### **4. Resource Requirements**

##### University Resources

- 4.1 Students following AMD programmes or modules have access to all of the support services afforded to on-campus students. These include:
  - (a) Membership of the Guild of Students, and access to its services;
  - (b) Access to counselling and guidance services, disability and learner support services and the Chaplaincy;
  - (c) Access to the personal tutor and welfare tutor system;
  - (d) Access to the Senior Tutor; and
  - (e) Information on the student representation system and how to get involved.

##### Learner Support

- 4.2 Students following Distance Learning programmes, as fully registered students of the University, will have access to the University's computing and library facilities. eLibrary and the services provided by Library Services to AMD students will be of particular importance, as will any resources offered through the University's Virtual Learning Environment.
- 4.3 Postgraduate Researchers conducting their research via Distance Learning will have full access to the University's Graduate School and the training and support provided by this team.
- 4.4 Schools will ensure that students following AMD programmes or modules have access to academic guidance and support at a similar level and frequency as similar campus-based students.
- 4.5 AMD learning is likely to be delivered via a variety of means across the University, and within a single programme, depending upon the specific learning being undertaken. Whatever system (which might include traditional hard-copy correspondence) is being used, the School will ensure that:

- (a) The delivery system is fit for purpose, has an appropriate availability and life expectancy, and has had its reliability tested;
- (b) Effective contingency plans are in place should the system fail;
- (c) 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; and
- (d) Study materials provided for AMD learning meet the University's expectations in respect of the quality of teaching and learning materials.

#### Research Degree Supervision

- 4.6 The arrangements and requirements for the supervision of research degrees undertaken by distance learning are set out in an appendix to the Code of Practice Supervision and Monitoring Progress of Postgraduate Researchers.

### **5. Provision of Information**

#### Prospective Students

- 5.1 It is important that prospective students have a direct access to clear explanations of:
- (a) the admission requirements of the programme, particularly where these include access to resources, hardware, and/or software and whether ongoing access to these is a requirement for continued registration on the programme;
  - (b) the expectations, including time commitment, that would be placed upon them as students on AMD programmes;
  - (c) the nature and extent of independent, collaborative and supported study contained within the programme;
  - (d) any requirement for attendance at any location at any time throughout the programme; and
  - (e) additional costs which might be associated with the programme such as travel and subsistence, or necessary provision for personal tutors to visit the student's location.

#### Induction

- 5.2 As part of the induction process it will be necessary for students on AMD programmes to receive information specific to their programme of study and study mode. This should include:

*For taught programmes, or research programmes with taught elements:*

- (a) Specifications for the programme of study and the modules contained within it, including the learning outcomes, teaching and learning methods, and the methods for assessment;
- (b) Information on the ways in which their achievements will be judged, and the relative weighting of modules of the programme in respect of assessment overall;

*For research programmes with or without taught elements:*

- (c) Research skills training, tailored project development planning, and agenda setting with supervisors;

*For all programmes:*

- (d) A clear schedule for the delivery of their study materials and for assessment or review of their work;
- (e) A schedule for any learner support available to them through timetabled activities, for example tutorial sessions or web-based conferences;
- (f) Clear and up-to-date information on the resources available to them as students;
- (g) Documents that set out their own responsibilities as learners, and the commitments of the School;
- (h) From the outset of their study, a supervisor (for postgraduate researchers) or personal tutor (for taught students), who can give them constructive feedback on academic performance and authoritative guidance on their academic progression; and
- (i) From the outset of their study, an identified contact, either local or remote through email, telephone, fax or post, who will act as administrator for the programme.

### Current Students

5.3 Throughout their programme of study, Schools will ensure that students have information about:

- (a) The mechanisms for providing formal feedback on their experience of the programme, including access to External Examiner reports, meetings with the External Examiner, and interaction with the Student Representation System (see 8.4 below);
- (b) Opportunities for inter-learner discussion, both to facilitate learning and to provide a basis for facilitating their participation in the quality assurance of the programme; and
- (c) If the programme is delivered via a collaborative organisation, the respective responsibilities of the awarding institution and the programme presenter for the delivery of the programme or element of the programme, as set out in the legal agreement.

## **6. Assessment**

### Taught Elements

6.1 The methods of assessment used for any programme or module will vary depending upon the nature of the learning to be assessed. In the case of programmes delivered by AMDs, the range of methods of assessment may be restricted if the students are not required to visit campus on any occasion. In considering the suitability of an assessment method, the School should also ensure that:

- (a) The mechanism(s) used for the submission of work are secure and reliable, and that there is a means of confirming its safe receipt;
- (b) Students' 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;
- (c) 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; and

- (d) Where the students are required to sit written assessments overseas, the management of the examination will be in line with the University's Code of Practice on the Conduct of Centrally Coordinated Formal Written Examinations.

- 6.2 Once assessment has taken place the School will ensure that timely summative and formative feedback is provided to the students in line with the expectations of the Code of Practice on Taught Programme and Module Assessment. It is particularly important that students on AMD programmes understand the School's approach to, and expectations for summative assessment.

#### Oral Examination

- 6.3 Where an oral examination is required, this will be held at the University, unless a request to hold it elsewhere, or by video/telephone conference, has been approved by the University Research Progress and Awards Sub-Panel. The School and the student will bear the respective costs of arranging suitable conferencing facilities in their locality.

### **7. Student Responsibilities**

- 7.1 Students undertaking AMDs should be aware of their own responsibilities as well as those of the School. Specifically students will:
  - (a) Understand and comply with University Legislation for example, Codes of Practice on Plagiarism, Reasonable Diligence and the General Conditions of Use of Computing and Networking Facilities<sup>1</sup>;
  - (b) Ensure they are aware of the schedule of learning activities, assessment deadlines and other important dates;
  - (c) Maintain an accurate record of contacts with the University, including receipts for submission of work;
  - (d) Carry out their studies with diligence and inform relevant staff of any change of circumstances which might affect their ability to continue studying on the programme or module;
  - (e) Maintain access to relevant hardware and/or software as specified in the admission requirements; and
  - (f) Ensure that any visits to the University from overseas are completed in compliance with the requirements of the UK Government at the time of travel. More information can be obtained from the International Students' Advisory Service  
<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/studentservices/international/index.aspx>

### **8. Review**

- 8.1 The University Quality Assurance Committee is responsible for ensuring the quality and standards of AMD provision through oversight of the Annual Review process.

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<sup>1</sup> The Code of Practice on Student Attendance and Reasonable Diligence continues to apply to students on AMD programmes. Whilst such students may be required to be in attendance for specified sessions, the term 'attendance' may also be taken to mean interaction with specified scheduled events, such as webinars or video conferences.



- 8.2 Schools should review their AMD provision as part of the Annual Review process. Assessment of AMD modules should be subject to scrutiny by External Examiners in line with the External Examiner System for Taught Programmes. Further information regarding the Annual Review and External Examiners processes is available at:  
<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/policy/quality/index.aspx>
- 8.3 There should also be mechanisms in place, via module evaluation for example, to solicit feedback from current and former students to ensure the quality and standards of the programme.
- 8.4 Schools are required to review the Policy on Student Representation and seek agreement from their College and the Student Representation System Advisory Board for any necessary amendments to the standard model of student representation in light of the particular needs of AMD programmes.

## **9. Responsibilities of Collaborative Organisations**

- 9.1 AMD programmes may be delivered with the support of a collaborative organisation, for example a facilitator who is local to the students.
- 9.2 The University's Collaborative Provision Committee has responsibility for approving all new collaborative arrangements. Agreement in principle must first be obtained from the Committee before proceeding with the development of a collaborative programme or programme element.
- 9.3 A legal agreement between the University and the collaborating organisation must be in place before any student can be registered upon the programme.
- 9.4 The respective responsibilities of the University and the collaborative organisation will be set out in the legal agreement, and will be made available to students.