



the british  
psychological society  
partnership and accreditation

# **SUPPLEMENTARY GUIDANCE** for **ACCREDITED ONLINE, BLENDED, AND DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMMES**

June 2021

[BPS.ORG.UK/PARTNERSHIP](https://bps.org.uk/partnership)

**GUIDANCE**

## CONTACT US

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If you have any questions about Accreditation through Partnership, or the process that applies to you please feel free to contact the Partnership and Accreditation Team:.

Email: [pact@bps.org.uk](mailto:pact@bps.org.uk)  
Tel: +44 (0)116 252 9563

Our address is:  
Partnership and Accreditation Team  
The British Psychological Society  
St Andrews House  
48 Princess Road East  
Leicester  
LE1 7DR

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If you have problems reading this document because of a visual impairment and would like it in a different format, please contact us with your specific requirements.

t: +44 (0)116 252 9523; e: [P4P@bps.org.uk](mailto:P4P@bps.org.uk).

For all other enquires please contact the Society on:  
t: +44 (0)116 254 9568; e: [info@bps.org.uk](mailto:info@bps.org.uk)



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# INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND

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The Partnership and Accreditation Committee identified a need with regard to providing further guidance for providers of online, blended, and distance learning programmes. The Society currently accredits online provision for undergraduate, conversion and Masters Stage 1 programmes offered by institutions across the UK (some with international partners). Increasingly providers are seeking accreditation for programmes using this mode of delivery. With the development of new technologies, new models of remote teaching and learning are becoming increasingly popular with students. These new technologies allow students the flexibility to fit studying into their schedule whether on full-time or part-time basis. The overall aim being for students to be in control of their own learning and development and to achieve a better study and life balance. For providers these new technologies also open up opportunities to design programmes that are fit for the 21st century learning.

Online learning also plays a significant role in distance, and blended learning models. In March 2020, the swift response to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic necessitated the need for a national lockdown. This was a catalyst for stakeholders to undertake emergency planning and develop remote forms of teaching and learning to move campus-based programmes online. As a result, new blended learning models emerged across the sector and this new form of engagement will continue throughout lockdown periods and beyond. The Society's own model for accreditation visits also shifted to online remote working and new technologies have been utilised to ensure that all accreditation activity can continue to ensure stakeholders are able to remain compliant with the accreditation standards. The Society recognises that compared to the more traditional campus-based delivery model, online, blended, and distance learning models will have significant differences in their approach to delivery and assessment. The Society acknowledges the importance of recognising these different delivery and assessment models and in response to this seeks to provide this guidance and support to enable providers to demonstrate that their programme meets the Society's accreditation standards.

Additionally, The Society would like to ensure that appropriate guidance is in place for reviewers to effectively and appropriately review online and distance learning programmes against the Society's accreditation standards. This will ensure that reviewers are confident in their identification of areas of excellence and address any areas of concern to guarantee a continued high standard of delivery for accredited online, blended, and distance learning programmes. What we must ensure is that nothing is omitted, and that there is no dilution of the standards to fit this mode of delivery.

## ACCREDITATION GUIDANCE (BPS WEBSITE)

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We would signpost stakeholders to our *Accreditation Standards for Undergraduate, Conversion and Integrated Masters programmes, and for Stage 1 Postgraduate programmes* available on the [BPS website](#). The relevant standards must be consulted in line with this guidance. Together with the *Covid-19 guidance for reasonable adjustments during the pandemic period*, also available on the [BPS website](#).

The guidance in this document has been set out in line with those accreditation standards.

(As a general note, some parts of this guidance might also be helpful for Doctoral programmes that have moved some programme elements to online delivery during the current pandemic.)

## PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document provides supplementary guidance to help amplify criteria within the accreditation standards. It invites institutions to reflect and consider the range of activities and processes undertaken organised around the accreditation standards. It considers the advantages and challenges associated with delivering an online, blended, or distance learning programmes, providing examples that might help to address particular issues. The document highlights some key considerations for each of the eight overarching accreditation standards for undergraduate, conversion and Stage 1 programme providers.

## CONSULTATION

This document has been produced following direct consultation with education providers online, blended, and distance learning programmes, together with representatives from the Society's training, and education committees. In addition, during 2019–2020 accreditation teams have visited and reviewed a number of online, blended, and distance learning programmes and listened to feedback from students and programme staff, alongside observing online platform operations.

## WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CAMPUS-BASED, ONLINE PROVISION, BLENDED, AND DISTANCE LEARNING PROVISION?

Campus-based learning, is a traditional way to study where teaching, learning, staff, and student interactions are largely in person, on campus using group or individual face-to-face delivery. A number of campus-based programmes currently make use of a virtual learning environment (VLE) as a complementary tool to support learning, such as sharing lecture slides and discussion forums, however all teaching and group work takes place face-to-face on campus.

Online learning is an operational interactive study choice, for example through a VLE used to share recorded lectures and student resources. Students taking online programmes have opportunities for synchronous (virtual classroom) and asynchronous (discussion forums) learning and have the opportunity to interact with the programme team on a regular basis online. With the possible exception of summer schools, programmes delivered purely online do not have any directed study time on campus, all of the teaching and student interaction is through the VLE along with access to specific resources.

A combination of the two models is the blended learning model<sup>1</sup> where there may be a certain number of directed study days / research periods taking place on campus with the rest of the programme being delivered online.

The terms 'online learning' and 'distance learning' are used interchangeably however, there can be fundamental differences in how these programmes are delivered. Distance learning is usually a self-study course, where learning materials are sent to students via post or email and students must complete the set tasks according to the course schedule, often with minimal interaction with the programme team or fellow students.

<sup>1</sup> During the academic session 2020/2021 it is also recognised that there will be hybrid programmes. These are currently accredited campus-based programmes that have been rapidly moved across to online status and / or blended learning models as a result of Covid-19 in order to allow students and trainees to complete their programmes of study during the academic sessions 2019/2020 and 2020/2021.

## ACCREDITED ONLINE PROVISION

The Society has accredited a significant number of online programmes across a number of different providers. Across these programmes, there are a number of different delivery models that include:

- Providers with their own specific platform for online learning with their own designated team that supports online learning
- Providers with direct partnership arrangements with specific online specialist learning providers
- Providers who have a contract with a platform service provider to support their online delivery
- Providers who utilise a number of software packages, which together provide a platform for managing learning material and student engagement and support the remote working experience for example Zoom / Teams / Skype / Blackboard. This model is evident in many blended learning models.

There are some institutions with a proven track record of remote delivery whilst others are still exploring and embracing this new model of learning. A significant amount of development has been subsumed during the last two decades as technological advances such as the internet and highly developed mobile phones / tablets have become far more accessible and widely used. These advancements in technology have given users new skill-sets, which many now take for granted. When stating this, it is important to remember that access to technology is not uniform, there are environmental factors that restrict accessibility for example: remoteness in rural areas and lack of internet connections and internet speeds. There are also social factors for example: access for students requiring significant reasonable adjustments in both technology and assessment methods, marginalised individuals with little access to technology or IT training, the financial cost of devices and their upkeep.

The delivery methods of online and campus-based learning can be conceptualised as a continuum. At one end of the continuum is purely online learning and / or distance self-study learning which is undertaken remotely and at the other end of the continuum is campus-based learning that is delivered face-to-face at a designated institution. Blended learning combines both online and campus-based learning to varying levels depending on the programme and provider requirements.



## QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY (QAA) GUIDANCE

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Significantly, the Covid-19 pandemic has triggered higher education providers to take swift action to move provision to new blended learning models involving digital teaching and assessment. In the light of this move, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) published initial guidance that we would refer all of our stakeholders to [\*Questions to Inform a Toolkit for Enhancing Quality in a Digital Environment\*](#).

This guidance sets out some key considerations for maintaining quality in a digital environment. It also contains many useful links to other webpages. Following on from this QAA have produced an additional report, [\*How UK higher education providers managed the shift to digital delivery during the Covid-19 pandemic\*](#) (21 December, 2020).

This report details the flexibility required in the rapid and effective transition to blended learning resulting from the first initial lockdown on 23 March, 2020. We recommend that all providers that have shifted to blended learning read this document, as there are some very helpful insights into implementation strategies together with problem-solving and further recommendations for the blended learning approach.



# PROGRAMME STANDARDS

## PROGRAMME STANDARD 1: PROGRAMME DESIGN

All accredited online, blended, and distance learning providers must consider the design and structure of their programmes. Whilst aiming to offer and promote flexibility in learning it is essential that the design of the programme ensures that all accreditation standards can be met and that students are able to successfully achieve all of the required learning outcomes for both their accreditation and their award.

The following considerations might be helpful for providers to consider when designing such programmes:

| OPERATIONAL DESIGN  | ENABLING CONTENT  | QUALITY ASSURANCE   |
|---|---|---|
| <p><b>Platforms / operating systems: Licenses, compatibility and their continual updates.</b></p> <p><b>Virus protection and security</b></p> | <p>Technology is streamlined and easy to navigate.</p> <p>House style: Presentation, standardisation and consistency across the technologies – fair access.</p> <p>Careful consideration on the choices of platforms, software and technology – widening access.</p> <p>Safeguarding.</p> <p>GDPR.</p>  | <p>Fair access for all students.</p> <p>Consistency across platform’s software to ensure all content can be offered and no learning outcomes are missed due to display issues.</p> <p>User preferences and permissions with regard to access.</p> <p>Operational protection.</p>  |
| <p><b>Inclusivity</b></p>   | <p>Marketing, Student Admission, signposting - broader participation.</p> <p>In line with chosen technology and software, access to hardship funds to enable fair participation.</p> <p>Operations that promote fairness and parity across the programme, for example: decolonisation of the curriculum, barriers to learning, additional learning support.</p> <p>Adaptability and Flexibility in line with policies and procedures and the accreditation standards especially in regard to the Covid-19 guidance for blended learning programmes.</p> | <p>Widening Participation policy.</p> <p>Equality Impact Assessment on programme design.</p> <p>Monitoring Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI).</p> <p>Monitoring support and additional support.</p> <p>Monitoring tracking of student engagement.</p> <p>For blended learning models consult: <i><u>How UK higher education providers managed the shift to digital delivery during the Covid-19 pandemic</u></i> (21 December, 2020).</p> |

| OPERATIONAL DESIGN  | ENABLING CONTENT  | QUALITY ASSURANCE  |
|---|---|--|
| <p><b>Future proofed</b></p>  | <p>Content: Variable in length; bite-size v's comprehensive lectures (updating of outdated content) and improvements and risks.</p> <p>Flexibility in design required to accommodate the ability to revise and amend programme structure and content with ease.</p> | <p>Monitoring of any changes in the accreditation standards that requires content change (two-year grace period).</p> <p>Monitoring of any conditions from accreditation visits that requires content change.</p> <p>Programme revisions in line with the standards the current standards.</p>   |
| <p><b>Programme reach</b></p>   | <p>Programme design that accommodates global accessibility where required.</p> <p>Consideration of local, regional, national and international contexts.</p> <p>Decolonisation in the design.</p>   | <p>Equality Impact Assessment on programme design.</p> <p>Staff training: Programme staff have an awareness of intercultural sensitivity.</p> <p>It is also expected that there would be an adherence to UK standards of ethics alongside which staff also need to be cognisant of variations in other jurisdictions.</p>                        |
| <p><b>Delivery models</b></p>   | <p>Time zones and timetabling.</p> <p>Flexible delivery and assessment strategy: Pedagogy that match the technology and encompasses different learning modes and styles and is enabling for all students.</p>   | <p>Evaluation of effectiveness of models.</p> <p>Monitoring of delivery in line with technology – know the limitations.</p> <p>For blended learning models consult: <a href="#"><i>How UK higher education providers managed the shift to digital delivery during the Covid-19 pandemic</i></a> (21 December, 2020).</p>                         |
| <p><b>Security:</b></p> <p><b>What features can be inbuilt?</b></p> <p><b>What features will be manual?</b></p> | <p>Safeguarding content.</p> <p>Plagiarism and Intellectual Property rights.</p> <p>GDPR requirements.</p>  | <p>Recording: Storage / recordings and the update of outdated content / student and staff access.</p> <p>Contingency plans and back-up systems – versions and dates in line with the accreditation standards.</p> <p>Copyright and GDPR.</p> <p>How will this be policed?</p> <p>Recorded material must be in line with GDPR and permissions</p> |

| OPERATIONAL DESIGN        | ENABLING CONTENT  | QUALITY ASSURANCE   |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Award nomenclature</b> | The title of the Award must be fit for purpose and clear. For purely 'online' programmes the title must be differentiated from any 'on campus' programmes (where applicable). | The education provider must ensure that the title of any award accurately reflects the level of students' achievements (see 1.3 below). |

**1.1 DURATION AND LOCATION OF STUDIES**

The Society currently accredits a wide range of online and distance learning provision offered by institutions from across the UK (some with international partners). All accredited online and distance learning programmes are considered to be located in the UK with their named institution, as it is that institution that confers the award.

There is no stipulation with regard to a maximum study period however; programmes are reminded of the validity of content of programmes in line with the accreditation standards, and the QAA benchmark statement for psychology, and any other regulatory prerequisites.

**1.2 AWARD NOMENCLATURE**

It will be imperative to ensure that the title of the award accurately reflects the type of programme and the content and level of achievement. Providers must ensure that the title of any award accurately reflects the level of students' achievements, represents appropriately the nature and field(s) of study undertaken and is not misleading, either to potential employers or to the general public.

**1.3 ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENTS**

All programme designers should carefully consider how they develop their overall, and online assessment strategy and build in as much flexibility as possible to ensure variety in the type of assessments being designed. It is vitally important that assessments are fair, valid, reliable and inclusive, appropriate for the award being offered and cover all learning outcomes that need to be assessed. There should also be a clear strategy for the process of validating student / trainee identity, and authenticating their work. There is further guidance in the section on Assessment Strategy, which can be found on p.18.

**1.4 ENGAGEMENT AND MONITORING PROGRESS**

Whilst online and distance learning provides great flexibility and broader access, it also presents some challenges for both students and providers who do not have ongoing opportunities for direct face-to-face interactions, as these are mediated through technology. We would encourage providers to support the development of online communities, and not simply the ones created by the programme provider but also student communities' that might occur more naturally on campus, for example reading groups, debating societies, study mates.

One major challenge for the provider is how to monitor effectively all student engagement and progress. With advances in technology, virtual learning environments offer built in monitoring systems, highlighting students who may be at risk of disengaging or falling behind, for example, performance

dashboards indicate students who are struggling at an early stage and flag lack of student engagement. Both progress and engagement monitoring can be very effective if built into online learning environments at the design stage. The design would not simply focus on data collection and tracking systems but on purposeful monitoring and clear action points where needed. With the right processes and technical systems, monitoring student engagement and progress can be seamless and non-intrusive.

### **1.5 POTENTIAL FOR MULTI-CULTURAL PARTICIPATION**

The global village has a diverse and culturally rich student population, and online, blended and distance learning programmes can be very far reaching. There is significant debate around decolonisation of the curriculum across many disciplines and psychology needs to be at the forefront of this and a major consideration in any programme development. Therefore, it is a key that the diversity of the student body be reflected in both the programme content design, and ongoing developments (Programme standards 1 & 2). We would encourage programmes to reflect the strengths that are inherent in a far-reaching multicultural learning context and provide the cohorts with significant opportunities for students to share and draw on each other's experiences. Fundamentally, it is the acknowledgement of different learning practices, modes and styles across different cultures that will move forward the global learning agenda. There are also potential issues arising from learning in a multicultural context: e.g. the need for understanding differing cultures and their ethical practices, social mobility, differing approaches to mental health, and child rearing practices, attitudes to marginalised groups etc. Providers must carefully manage potential bias and ensure sufficient monitoring is in place to mitigate against any identified barriers to learning as they are identified.

There is also a need for contingency planning for any students located in potential high-risk areas. Providers must be alert to the fact that there might be rapid economic decline, socio-political regimes may fail, or there might be significant national health/environmental issues leading to instability within certain countries causing disruption to the student's learning environment. Currency deflation, earthquakes, pandemics, etc.

There are also significant advantages to multi-cultural participation for example: encouraging students to share diverse perspectives from their own backgrounds and of their interaction with others in the learning environment will broaden understanding and support the development of global citizenship. In this regard, and through attracting such a broad and diverse student cohort, online and distance learning can prove both an innovative and interesting offer.

## PROGRAMME STANDARD 2: PROGRAMME CONTENT (LEARNING, RESEARCH, PRACTICE)

### 2.1 PROGRAMME CONTENT REQUIREMENTS

All accredited programmes must reflect in their content design all contemporary learning, research and practice in psychology. Providers must also ensure that they meet all of the accreditation standards and that nothing is omitted. In particular, online, blended and distance learning programmes should be mindful of the following when developing and reviewing programme content:

| OPERATIONAL DESIGN   | ENABLING CONTENT   | QUALITY ASSURANCE  |
|--|--|--|
| <p><b>Platforms and operating systems displaying programme content</b></p> <p><b>Will the platform and operating system accommodate all the programme content requirements</b></p> | <p>How is content written for specific operating systems and do they affect the way that content is written?</p> <p>How is accredited content refreshed and updated? Particularly for asynchronous learning activity.</p> <p>How to ensure that Learning Outcomes are not obscured, This is especially important for core modules and GBC (undergraduate and conversion programmes).</p> <p>Might anything be lost in translation between devices?</p> | <p>How are accreditation updates tied into the quality assurance cycle in terms of planning and scheduling?</p> <p>What are the contingency plans for platform failure? How up-to-date are programme content back-up systems in line with accreditation standards?</p> <p>Equality Impact Assessment on content.</p> <p>Decolonisation of the curriculum.</p>  |
| <p><b>Written content – house style: Presentation, standardisation and consistency across the programme / programmes</b></p>   | <p>Core curriculum content.</p> <p>Mapping against accreditation standards.</p> <p>Is there standardisation of content across operating systems and devices? Are there any detrimental restrictions that create barriers to learning?</p> <p>How to ensure that Learning Outcomes are not omitted. This is especially important for core modules and GBC (undergraduate and conversion programmes).</p>  | <p>GBC must be covered in core modules only.</p> <p>How are updates monitored in line with the revisions to the accreditation standards?</p> <p>What controls are there over content permissions in terms of editing?</p> <p>How are changes to programme content tracked and recorded especially in terms of the need to inform the Society of any significant reviews / modifications to programmes?</p> |

| OPERATIONAL DESIGN  | ENABLING CONTENT  | QUALITY ASSURANCE  |
|---|---|--|
| <p><b>Written content – house style</b><br/><i>Cont.</i></p>                    |   | <p>How are all staff and students kept abreast of any revisions / modifications / updates onto the system?</p> <p>What checking mechanisms are in place to monitor bias and ensure parity and fairness?</p>  |
| <p><b>Equality and diversity</b></p>  | <p>Content accessibility.</p> <p>Decolonising of the curriculum and multicultural learning (across a broad cohort of students – regional / national / international).</p>                                 | <p>Equality Impact Assessment on content, delivery and assessment.</p> <p>Monitoring of EDI.</p>   |
| <p><b>Psychological literacy</b></p>  | <p>How is this integrated across programme content?</p>   | <p>How is this updated in line with new developments in psychology (especially for specific domain – Stage One programmes)?</p>  |
| <p><b>Assessment strategy:</b><br/><b>What is the range of assessments?</b></p> | <p>How does content fit with the assessment strategy and inclusive assessment?</p>  | <p>How does assessment scheduling work across time zones and timetabling.</p> <p>Examinations in different time zones. Deadlines and mechanisms for submitting work across time zones.</p> <p>Is this equitable and fair?</p>  |
| <p><b>Assessment content</b></p>  | <p>Does the software or operating system limit assessment format in any way?</p> <p>For example, are there any restriction in the way that the assessments are presented across different technology?</p> | <p>All GBC learning outcomes must be assessed.</p> <p>How are any shortcomings addressed?</p> <p>Do all of the online assessment methods cover all of the required accredited learning outcomes?</p> <p>Are alternative assessment methods in place should the online model fail?</p> <p>Are reasonable adjustments in place to support students?</p> <p>Is technical support available during assessment periods?</p> |

| <b>OPERATIONAL DESIGN</b>                          | <b>ENABLING CONTENT</b>  | <b>QUALITY ASSURANCE</b>  |
|--|--|---|
| <b>Delivery</b>                                    | Empirical projects knowledge of online research methods and experience of using online data collection tools.  | Are staff trained in delivery of online research methods including a sound knowledge of online data collection methods?<br><br>Have staff used and reviewed some online research and data collection tools prior to delivery? |
| <b>Group work and wider stakeholder engagement</b> | Working with wider groups / stakeholders and the mechanisms for this?<br><br>Does technology limit / enhance this?<br><br>How is group-work incorporated into the programme? | Where appropriate, how is this incorporated into the programme and monitored.   |
| <b>GDPR / Copyright</b>                            | Plagiarism, Copyright and GDPR.  | How is this policed and monitored especially for online research?   |

## PROGRAMME CONTENT REQUIREMENTS

Programmes need to embed the wider skills outlined in the Psychology Subject Benchmark Statement into their programme content so that on graduating from the programme students have valuable transferable skills alongside subject-specific skills.

Specific consideration should be given to how broader skills development will differ compared to face-to-face delivery, e.g. oral communication, digital skills, and team working skills. Some skills are more traditionally developed through hands-on experience, e.g. development of psychological literacy and practical research skills development, and online providers will need to consider effective ways of engaging students in practical research work, interactive and applied learning. Examples providers may wish to consider are:

| <b>WIDER SKILLS</b>                 | <b>OUTLINE</b>  |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Digital literacy</b>             | empowerment through the use of different online – distance learning tools and platforms.  |
| <b>Literacy and numeracy skills</b> | embedded within the learning for competence in different contexts and using different online / VLE tools.   |
| <b>Oral communication skills</b>    | Use technology enabled methods such as video tasks or presentations and encourage communication with other students, for example a Zoom / Teams / Skype interview or role play. |

| WIDER SKILLS                                       | OUTLINE   |
|--|---|
| <b>Problem-solving</b>                             | Real world activities and tasks for students to complete both independently and as a group.   |
| <b>Time management</b>                             | This can be developed throughout self-directed study and planning for various deadlines as well as asynchronous working as a group on a project. Pertinent to different time zones.   |
| <b>Ethical thinking</b>                            | For best practice, Ethics should be embedded across the whole programme and not limited to research. This is specifically important in relation to future practice and working in a professional capacity (see Programme Standard 3).                             |
| <b>Group team-working, and presentation skills</b> | Activities and tasks for students to complete as a group should raise awareness to group-working skills. For example time management, team members' contributions, facilitating screen sharing; document sharing using different platforms and software packages. |
| <b>Autonomous learning</b>                         | Encourage and develop independent learning, personal planning, self-reflection in line with any technological advances and skills required.   |

### READINESS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

Due to the wider accessibility of these programmes, there may be significant differences in terms of students' backgrounds, previous learning and achievements, academic and study skills, cultural diversity, together with their expectations and aspirations. It will be essential to embrace equality diversity and inclusion in the full and understand the myriad of issues that individual students face. These can be addressed in any tutorials and discussions around learning plans. It will be important to remove any barriers to learning that may exist or may occur as students' progress through the programme.

Technical skills and access arrangements need careful consideration. Whilst many traditional students have different demands on their time, e.g. jobs, caring responsibilities, etc. The implications for online delivery may not always support **or** encourage live participation especially with regard to timetabling across time zones. It is often assumed that online programmes are by nature far more accessible to students, but it very important to remember that very much depends on all favourable factors being aligned. This should be explored with students at the point of admission and during induction.

### TEACHING AND LEARNING

For online and distance teaching and learning aspects of the programme the following might be considered:

- Articulation of a strategy that evidences breadth and depth of GBC curriculum or postgraduate curriculum coverage
- Strategy for teaching practical skills (research methods\*, biopsychology, cognitive psychology)
- Assessment strategy: pedagogy should match the available technology
- The use of meaningful teaching and learning analytics will help to support your understanding of student engagement and that is of the utmost importance.

Programmes should endeavour to make online learning materials engaging and accessible to all students.

## BLENDING LEARNING

The following table provides an example of the four-stage learning model adopted by one provider for a blended learning teaching session. This is an example of good practice demonstrating how pedagogy which enhances student learning – may influence the delivery method.

Example: Four-stage learning model for a Blended Learning Teaching (session).

| LEARNING MODE                                    | TEACHING MODE  | TEACHING DELIVERY  | EFFECT ON STUDENT / MONITORING OF LEARNING  |
|--|--|--|---|
| Orientation discovery.                           | Online asynchronous.                                 | Intro to topic: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Written intro in module handbook</li> <li>Short video or audio file introducing the topic on Moodle</li> <li>Lecture or set reading.</li> </ul>                                       | Student's expectations are set, motivation to learn aroused.  |
| Learning exploration.                            | Online synchronous or asynchronous.<br>Face-to-face. | Main teaching work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lecture</li> <li>Seminar</li> <li>Workshop</li> <li>Reading.</li> </ul>   | Student understands content / concepts / theory / skills covered in learning outcomes, attains threshold performance. |
| Extended learning sharing discussion practicing. | Face-to-face.<br>Online synchronous.                 | Main learning work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Independent further reading</li> <li>Seminar – Discussion, critical evaluation</li> <li>Workshop – Skills practice</li> <li>Group work</li> <li>Experiential learning.</li> </ul> | Deep learning.<br>Mastery.<br>Preparation for assessment.<br>Participation and engagement can be assessed.            |
| Application of learning.                         | Online mostly asynchronous.                          | Formative and / or summative assessment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quizzes, learning journals, homework tasks</li> <li>Collaborative discussion forums</li> <li>Summative assessment tasks.</li> </ul>                          | Participation and engagement can be assessed.<br>Student performance can be graded in relation to attainment of LO's. |

We would again encourage all providers with such blended learning models (especially where this is a result of a shift due to the Covid-19 pandemic) to consult the following QAA document *How UK higher education providers managed the shift to digital delivery during the Covid-19 pandemic* (21 December 2020).

## **OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEANINGFUL PRACTICAL WORK**

Psychology is a research-informed discipline, it is therefore essential for students to acquire practical research skills. Providers will need to give particular attention to how students gain experience in a qualitative, quantitative, and mixed research methods. The accreditation standards stipulate that students gain skills in collecting and analysing data. In an on campus university setting, this is achieved through practical work in a laboratory.

Therefore, careful thought should be given to how students can emulate this practical learning in a digital context, e.g. through virtual lab experiences, access to validated psychometric instruments, which allow them to collect data in their everyday context (subject to ethical approval).

The main consideration is access to a wide range of online resources to support practical work. Therefore there is a need for well thought through ecologically valid learning experiences e.g. measurement of biological and psychophysical variables, accessing online experimental or psychometric data collection packages. Obviously, this may have an impact on the cost-effective resourcing of online / distance learning degrees not simply in terms of kit but also staffing and technical support, so this cost needs to be figured into the design and sustainability of the programme at the planning stage.

## **ASSESSMENT STRATEGY**

Technology has to be at the forefront of the assessment, and programme designers need to consider a coherent assessment strategy across the programme/s tailored specifically to this. A number of these models are often rolling programmes with multiple intake points, and with multi-tutor delivery, considerations for the assessment strategy should dovetail with the capability of the select technology in terms of platform and the content. It is appreciated that the assessment strategies available may be restricted by technology and content. Despite the restrictions, there should be flexibility and choice of assessment methods and they should be as diverse and wide ranging as possible to incorporate different learning modes and styles. All assessment methods and feedback must also be fair, repeatable, and reliable.

## **ASSESSMENT PRACTICES**

### **INCLUSIVE ASSESSMENT**

The inclusive assessment strategy should not be diluted due to restrictions created by technology, so it is important to consider the diverse needs and abilities of students in the design stages. Programmes should consider what additional learning support might be required for students. The online, blended or distance nature of programmes should potentially have greater diversity and reach with regard to student populations. Pertaining to assessment Eurocentric assumptions in assessment design should be avoided. There needs to be by careful consideration of what makes sense to students in the wider online, blended or distance learning environment, especially any individual in restricted environments. Consideration should be given to language, accessibility of assessment tasks, including technology that might assist and enhance participation and remove barriers to learning.

## EXAMINATIONS

Providers will need to ensure that content is secure and not compromised when working with students across time zones. Using local exam centres may be a partial solution but does not fully address the issue of content of an exam paper being leaked ahead of time.

If you assess contribution to student discussion forums, there needs to be clear guidance of what is expected and what exactly is assessed – it may impact on students' willingness to contribute freely (and therefore undermine learning processes), so this needs to be underpinned with an appropriate rationale.

There may be other examples. The key here is to link to Standard 1.4.1: The need to have a coherent assessment strategy that maps clearly on programme and learning outcomes and incorporates formative and summative assessment. Online programmes need to think carefully about what is assessed and, the practicalities around assessment.

## FLEXIBILITY AND ASSESSMENT DEADLINES

It is important for online and distance learning programmes to remain flexible but set clear guidelines and parameters around assessment deadlines and extensions. The decision-making around this is very much dependent upon the type of programme, study mode, the entry dates and the make-up of the cohort/s. It is essential to be aware of what the particular constraints are depending on where students are located (e.g. time zones, cultural holiday periods, and access arrangements) together with their individual personal circumstances (e.g. shift pattern working) and make allowances for these constraints. Further considerations might be:

- Providing students with an online content and assessment map for each module, with an overview of the module content broken down into a weekly session-by-session planner, which will assist students with their time management.
- Weekly tasks (discussion boards or journals) with deadlines and deadlines for the main pieces of coursework will also be helpful. If this is available at the commencement of their studies then students can plan their work accordingly.
- Embracing technology, there are an abundance of calendar tools / Apps / teams which can be used to send an announcement regarding a module to say there is a weekly task due or the date an assignment is due. (It would be helpful if such items were compatible across types of devices for example mobile phones/tablets. It is also important to have consistency across modules in relation to the presentation and the location of information for such devices)
- Helpful features such as automatic flagging systems for the receipt and return of assessments.

## PROGRAMME STANDARD 3: WORKING ETHICALLY AND LEGALLY

Programmes should evaluate how ethical principles are embedded throughout the programme, along with the oversight and supervision arrangements for research projects and engagement with local permissions, for example use of data and data protection laws.

The programme team should be aware of individual differences (race, gender, religious beliefs, and attitudes to women) and how these may play out between students as they interact online through group work and discussion boards. Whilst being respectful of and not undermining individuals' beliefs, it is imperative that the programme team manage online etiquette and set principles around dignity and being respectful of others' viewpoints and beliefs<sup>2</sup>.

Cultural sensitivity is a particular area that providers may wish to seek advice on, there are various strategies that online, and distance learning programmes can implement to ensure that course content is culturally sensitive:

- Work with EDI production support specialists comment on module content.
- Ensure EDI among critical readers and that at least one of the critical readers has the knowledge and expertise relevant to the equalities and diversity agenda required to make an informed judgment about the course content.
- Encourage a global inclusive perspective, embracing global institutions for example: The World Health Organisation, or real-life, illustrative examples.
- Encourage content that explores theories and application from a geo-political and in terms of socio-cultural diversity and impact.
- Provide staff development activities to ensure awareness of issues of diversity and cultural sensitivity and how to consider these in the development of teaching resources.

The programme team should also think about the implications of working online and the ethical protection of students and what they disclose. Programme staff should consider what questions and tasks are posed on discussion boards and there should be guidance provided to students around what type of responses are expected, making sure that students are aware not to disclose anything they do not want to.

In an online environment, it is important to monitor students in both their understanding and application of the importance of working ethically and legally.

There are quite wide ethical and legal implications for research projects, ethical and legal implications would depend on the nature of the project and where in the world they it is being carried out. The Society's *Code of Human Research Ethics* will always apply. Programme staff would have to work with

<sup>2</sup> Sensitivity towards contextual, interpersonal factors, social and cultural differences are important skills for students to develop and hold as psychology graduates. This should be given particular consideration for online programmes where there is scope for recruitment of students from a wide range of countries and cultural backgrounds. Programmes might encourage sensitivity and reflection on contextual and interpersonal factors by getting students to discuss different contextual factors as part of group work. This will provide the opportunity for students to reflect on their own online etiquette and how they respect other's viewpoints and beliefs. Programmes might create shared activity assignments, designed so that they encourage exploration of the assignment question in the student's own cultural context and then ask students to comment on its application across other cultural contexts.

the student to consider the cultural context and any additional ethical requirements would have to be met, and closely monitored.

**PROGRAMME STANDARD 4: SELECTION AND ADMISSIONS**

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Providers must apply appropriate selection and entry criteria in line with the accreditation standards that are consistent with promoting equality of opportunity to as diverse a range of applicants as possible. Online, blended, and distance learning programmes will need to take into account that there may potentially be a higher number of international students applying to these programmes, therefore programmes will need to be mindful of all entry requirements in line with the accreditation standards. Where appropriate, for international students providers should use the UK National Agency for the Recognition and Comparison of International Qualifications and Skills (NARIC). Providers will set their own English language requirements for international students and for all online and distance learning providers consideration should be given to the requirements set.

Online learning is technology enabled and provides many opportunities but not without issues that can come with technology, enabled remote working and providers need to consider how to manage such issues. This includes the remote locations of students, their internet speed, technical support, study support, and the timings for teaching and deadlines. All of which need to be very clearly articulated to the students before the commencement of their programme of study. The main aim is inclusivity and how to promote an equal learning experience. Careful consideration needs to be given to points of entry and pre-sessional preparation, ensuring readiness for learning (e.g. skills audits, and especially technical skills audits), arrangements for individual support, with very clear lines of contact, etc. Supplementary to this is the support during the programme. It would be valuable to discuss any foreseeable technological issues and barriers to learning with students during the admissions period.

## PROGRAMME STANDARD 5: STUDENT DEVELOPMENT AND PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP

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The programme must be able to articulate a strategy for supporting students' personal and professional development for online, blended, or distance learning provision. Providers may wish to consider how they inform students of the potential flexibility in study offered, and how this is embedded and managed across all models the programme team should have in place a suitable induction and orientation to the VLE.

With some models programme staff and students will not be meeting in person, it is important to consider the different methods for a member of the programme team to become conversant with each student within the online environment. Especially the personal tutor assigned to each student. This named tutor would be the student's primary point of contact for queries which may be via telephone, email, online live chat, online rooms, forums and discussions boards, and face-to-face on modules offering blended learning provision. In line with the accreditation standards, it is important that all students are allocated a personal tutor and that there are regular sessions with the personal tutor. In some models of online learning, that have been directly observed there is a supplementary tutor who sits alongside the academic personal tutor. This can often be beneficial however; the non-academic personal tutor should not be a replacement or a barrier to students accessing their academic personal tutor. If a dual personal / academic tutoring system is in operation then it is vitally important that there is open communication between the two tutors and that the student feels able to access them equally. Students may have twenty-four-hour access to the VLE making it important to consider what the best means of communication are for the student and their personal tutor. As students may have 24-hour access to the VLE, to manage students' expectations, it should be clear when they can contact their personal tutor and the expected response time. It may also be necessary for a personal tutor or dissertation supervisor to consider flexible working hours to accommodate students from any differences in time zones.

### SUPPORT FOR PERSONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Programmes should recognise the transferable skills that students have developed prior to enrolment on to the programme and how elements of the programme support with developing these further. There are various ways that this might be approached:

- Online discussions students could be encouraged to bring their own experiences to bear where relevant, so engagement via student to student and student to tutor interactions lie at the heart of the pedagogical approach.
- Students should be introduced to and use a range of tools to search for, collate, present and evaluate content in a digital manner both synchronously and asynchronously. Through such experiences, current transferable skills are further developed and enhanced.
- Attempts could be made, if appropriate, via assignments to 'allow' students to use transferable skills that have been either introduced or further developed within the online modules they have experienced.
- Stage 1 students could complete a skills audit and SWOT analysis as part of their induction, then could then be asked to reflect on this throughout their programme of study. This would inform the content of modules and any areas whether further support may be required.

- Students could keep a reflective log, such as an e-portfolio or online journal, where they have to monitor their progress, skills attained and training needs and reflect on personal and professional development.

All students should be able to articulate the transferable skills they have developed for future job or programme applications. Programmes should ensure students are supported and given advice on how to improve on the information provided in their CV. Career events are also a valuable opportunity for past students to come back to share their experience post-graduation, and review how the course helped them to gain employment or prepared them for further training in psychology. This is very insightful for the students on the course and allows them to think about employment opportunities and the skills they have acquired.

## **EMPLOYABILITY AND CAREERS DEVELOPMENT**

For providers with a traditional campus-based delivery as well as online, blended, or distance learning provision; students should have suitable access to careers support irrespective of their programme of study. Providers should consider carefully how to incorporate employability guidance, advice and support and what technological mechanisms are in place to support students in developing their career aspirations. It is also important to consider 'reach' due to the nature and format of the programme an individual's aspirations might extend to international career aspirations, so careers advice needs to be tailored to the online, blended or and distance learning approach. Fundamental to this is understanding why students have chosen to study the programme in its particular format and what their ambitions are following completion of their programme, for all programme types and providers this can be especially prevalent for online and distance learning provision due to the potential increased diversity in the student body.

One possible solution to help programme teams understand this is to invite students to complete a questionnaire outlining study ambitions at the start of their studies and this could be used to assess the suitability of supporting resources and information provided.

Another consideration is how a programme links up to resources, such as: alumni podcasts, employer podcasts, BPS website resources, graduate careers websites and more general recruitment websites, interactive multimedia career planning and job seeking workbooks advising on CV writing, job applications, interviews, etc. This could also have a more global dimension.

To complement this individual careers consultations might include short online interactive modules and live web chat or phone consultations. Programmes might also consider running online annual careers forums and webinars, with live chat options, with both academic and careers staff. These might be recorded for continued access to their content.

## **STUDENT SUPPORT AND ENGAGEMENT**

Compared to a campus-based programmes where students will be interacting regularly face-to-face, it is essential to encourage students to feel part of an online academic community and able to engage fully in the programme. This includes building relationships with other students and programme staff to help provide a good experience of the programme and their wider involvement with their university. Some examples of different ways to nurture an online academic community include:

- Hold online ‘getting to know’ your cohort sessions to help break down barriers and understand any social and cultural differences. This will also help to promote dignity and respect.
- Inviting students to weekly research seminars, for example via Zoom, Teams, Skype or dial-in. These sessions might be recorded for students who cannot attend the live sessions.
- Invite students to join the psychological society at their university.
- Invite students to join on-campus alumni events via live streaming (and recorded) and encourage these students to ask questions live.
- Invite students to join any online alumni network.
- Encourage student representatives to attend staff / student committee meetings via Zoom, Teams, Skype, or dial-in.
- Have a dedicated careers hub that all students, including online and distance learning students (if the programme is being offered by a campus-based provider), can access; with keynote talks that are live streamed and recorded.
- Have programme wide asynchronous forums on different subjects such as careers or personal development.
- Have various recognition awards on offer. For example a Citizenship Award, an additional award students can gain by participating in research groups, committees, etc.
- Have shared resources available that offer collaborative learning and engagement.

The programme team should represent the demands of learning and teaching online at university committees so that there is an awareness in the differences and considerations that are needed to support this provision.

- Invite the careers service and library service to speak directly to students via synchronous or asynchronous video sessions.
- Facilitate the election of online student representatives and training conducted by the Students’ Union.
- Inform students of the aspects of the University’s wellbeing services that can be accessed by online students’ e.g. mental health courses online, telephone service.
- For campus-based providers offering online and distance learning programmes ensure the University’s wellbeing services are informing those students as to how they can be accessed remotely, for example, mental health courses online, and telephone services.

## **PASTORAL CARE AND STUDENT WELLBEING**

There should be no reduction in the personal support and wellbeing services offered to students. As with on campus programmes there should be clear signposting, referral and sufficient provision made available, for example: counselling services.

In essence, students’ wellbeing should be a focus for the whole approach, and early interventions should be made to alleviate and difficulties before these escalate out of control.

Students who are not making active contributions should be approached early, to make sure that they are not experiencing any wellbeing issues. If this is the case, the programme team should consider what support could be put in place for the student and how this will be accessed. Any access arrangement for any online support sessions will need very careful consideration. The programme

team need to have an awareness of student workload across modules and help should be made available in the planning of workloads so that students do not become overburdened. careful planning and posting of hand-in dates at the beginning of the programme will be very helpful.

## PROGRAMME STANDARD 6: ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP AND PROGRAMME DELIVERY

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There are significant similarities and differences in the skills that are required by the staff delivering online and distance learning programmes compared to traditional campus-based programmes. Significantly the reskilling / upskilling in terms of use of technology, especially platform operations, content production, teaching tools, recording of material will be required so it is essential that all programme staff are trained and capable of delivering their workload online / at distance both safely and effectively. Therefore, the education provider must have appropriate human resources in place to support the effective delivery of the programme, including appointing an appropriately qualified and experienced director or co-ordinator. Online and distance programmes diverge from traditional campus-based programmes in a number of important ways that impact on Programme Standard 6. Especially staffing and workload models.

Standards 1 and 2 (some considerations for the design and content stage):

- Pedagogy around the use of technology – it is vitally important that staff have the right skills sets and if there are gaps in knowledge or skills then training and development opportunities should be made available.
- Mapping assessments and skills to be evaluated to technology – it is vitally important that staff understand how the use of technology can enhance the mapping and evaluation process. Again, training and development opportunities should be made available.
- Student engagement – training should be provided to assist staff to fully engage with their students when using virtual environments, also moving between virtual classroom environments into on campus learning environments.
- Monitoring progress – built in monitoring systems should be made user-friendly and staff should be encouraged to use these to their full potential.
- Assessment and feedback – this must be standardised across the staff cohort and training and standardisation processes must be in place to ensure that all assessments are valid, reliable, and fair.
- Reflect and agree principles of teaching & learning for an online environment. It is most important that at the onset of any online teaching sessions staff are made fully aware of the essential principles for example: Session lengths, their involvement in the session, safeguarding, GDPR, EDI.

Education providers need to consider the sustainability of their staff base for online and distance learning programmes. This should include (see table):

## ONLINE, BLENDED & DISTANCE LEARNING STAFFING RESOURCE OVERVIEW

| ROLE                                 | CONSIDERATIONS  | REQUIREMENTS  |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| <p><b>Senior Management Team</b></p> | <p>Significant buy-in to the requirements for sustainable operations of an online / distance learning programme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contractual agreements with any third party (platform providers etc.)<sup>3</sup>.</li> <li>• Finance and investment plan.</li> <li>• Human resource and workload plan.</li> <li>• Training and upskilling plan (especially with regards to technology).</li> <li>• Implementation of monitoring of SSR and controls over students admissions and staffing requirements (SSR)<sup>3</sup>.</li> <li>• Checking of contractual staff for conflicts of interest with any other programmes of study<sup>3</sup>.</li> <li>• Student intake monitoring.</li> <li>• Risk assessment and contingency planning.</li> <li>• Sustainability planning.</li> </ul> | <p>Planned workload model, especially with regard to full time / part-time / contracted staff.</p> <p>Effective monitoring of staffing levels (Academic / Technical / Administrative / Wider Support).</p> <p>Effective systems for timely recruitment.</p> <p>Effective monitoring of staffing resources.</p> <p><b>Across all programmes:</b></p> <p>Programme Standard 6.3 Staff student ratio (SSR) – for continuing ongoing accreditation the SSR must be maintained.</p> <p>Programme Standard 6.4 must be maintained at all times.</p> <p>With regard to the standards for accreditation of undergraduate, conversion and integrated Masters programmes in psychology: All programmes operating with only sessional / fractional staff contracts MUST demonstrate how Programme Standard 6.4.5 is met on a continuous basis.</p> |

<sup>3</sup> It is vital important where online/distance learning programmes have significant numbers of fractional contracted staff that all staff employed declare any other teaching commitments and conflicts of interests. This is significant where the staff are employed by the third party rather than the university/provider. Any staff employed on contracted hours if employed elsewhere could indirectly affect other SSRs if they have teaching commitments on other accredited programmes.

| ROLE   | CONSIDERATIONS  | REQUIREMENTS   |
|--|---|--|
| <p><b>Programme Director / Leader</b></p>        | <p>Appropriately qualified with the additional skills knowledge and ability to understand the dynamics of online programmes – delivery and operations (demonstrated in their C.V.)</p>  | <p>This must be a significant part of the individual’s commitment. It can be a shared role, especially if this brings in more expertise. It will be expected that the Programme Director also has significant experience of online / distance learning.</p>  |
| <p><b>Programme staff (Academic)</b></p>         | <p>Academically qualified in line with the requirements in the standards with the additional skills knowledge and ability to understand the dynamics of online programmes – delivery and operations (demonstrated in their C.V.).</p> <p>Ongoing training available (for platform operations).</p>  | <p>Staffing needs to be more flexible in order to be able to respond to fluctuations in student numbers. Online providers, therefore, typically rely more on fractional staff contracted to deliver specific instances of modules rather than permanent, full-time staffing.</p> <p>It is essential that for undergraduate, conversion and integrated Masters programmes that Programme Standard 6.4, and especially 6.4.5 is met in full. It is expected that the five members of academic staff are fixed and not variable throughout the academic session (with the exception of leavers and new recruits).</p> |
| <p><b>Programme staff (Academic support)</b></p> | <p>Appropriately qualified in line with the requirements in the standards with the additional skills knowledge and ability to understand the dynamics of online programmes – delivery and operations (demonstrated in their C.V.).</p> <p>Ongoing training available (for platform operations).</p> | <p>Such members of staff might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff with Accredited Psychology degree</li> <li>• Staff with degree / significant experience / specific specialism in content support and delivery.</li> </ul>   |

| ROLE   | CONSIDERATIONS  | REQUIREMENTS  |
|--|---|---|
| <p><b>Specialist instructional designers</b></p>                             | <p>Support staff content writers / developers (Specialist Psychology backgrounds, usually graduates and postgraduates).</p> <p>Appropriately qualified in line with the requirements in the standards with the additional skills knowledge and ability to understand the dynamics of online programmes – delivery and operations (demonstrated in their C.V.).</p> <p>Ongoing training available (for platform operations).</p> | <p>Preparation of online content including teaching and assessment materials. This activity may be more distinct for online than traditional providers, and may also be pooled.</p> <p>Thus, online providers may separate production and quality control of teaching materials from actual delivery and assessment in terms of staff responsibilities for these different aspects, whereas responsibilities of staff at traditional providers tend to subsume all three.</p> |
| <p><b>Demonstrators U/G 20% Hourly paid staff Time limited contracts</b></p> | <p>GTA / full-time developmental (PhD).</p>   | <p>Lab sessions (do count in).</p>  |
| <p><b>Instructional designers</b></p>  | <p>Support staff content writers / developers (non-subject specialist).</p> <p>Appropriately qualified in line with the requirements in of their role with the additional skills knowledge and ability to understand the dynamics of online programmes – delivery and operations (demonstrated in their C.V.).</p> <p>Ongoing training available (for platform operations).</p>   | <p>Preparation of general materials, for the programme in line with support staff responsibilities.</p>   |

| ROLE   | CONSIDERATIONS   | REQUIREMENTS   |
|--|--|--|
| <p><b>Programme technical support staff</b></p>      | <p>Appropriately qualified specific technical support both for implementation and operation of online and distance learning programmes and this applies to both students and staff. Helpdesks and day today technical staff and student support (across time zones).</p> | <p>Programme Standard 6.5 Professional Support Staff – for continuing ongoing accreditation the SSR must be maintained. Consider the need for full technical support available for 24hr periods across time zones. Thus, online providers may separate production and quality control of teaching materials from actual delivery and assessment in terms of staff responsible for these different aspects, whereas responsibilities of staff at traditional providers tend to subsume all three.</p> |
| <p><b>Programme administrative support staff</b></p> | <p>If this resource is pooled then the dedicated part needs to be made transparent in line with the standards.</p>   | <p>Programme Standard 6.5 Professional Support Staff – for continuing ongoing accreditation the SSR must be maintained. Providers should make clear what proportion of staff are available to the programme from pooled resources. Named 'go to' individuals are essential.</p>  |
| <p><b>University specialist support staff</b></p>    | <p>Careers / Pastoral Care / Library.</p>  | <p>There must be clear evidence that there is input from such specialist staff.</p>  |
| <p><b>Wider support staff</b></p>                    | <p>Support staff general – helpdesks.</p>  | <p>Accessible across time-zones.</p>   |

**ALL STAFFING AND STUDENT INFORMATION MUST BE ENTERED INTO THE SOCIETY'S DATA CAPTURE TOOL WHEN REQUESTED AND RETURNED SHOWING AN ACCURATE REFLECTION OF THE PROGRAMME SSR AT A PARTICULAR MOMENT IN TIME.**

## WORKLOAD MODEL

Programmes should have a robust workload model in place that recognises each member of staff contributing to the programme (full-time staff, part-time staff, Associate Lecturers, tutors), the hours they are being paid for and their role (developing material, module delivery). This should be used to calculate staff workloads, for example, the maximum number of modules tutors can deliver per annum. This workload model should be reviewed and updated regularly to inform the overall workload planning for each member of staff.

- Traditional programmes tend to work to annual student number targets whereas intake is more flexible and unpredictable for many online providers because it is demand driven.
- The weighting in terms of staff time of each of these primary teaching and learning activities may be different in online provision. Learning models in online provision commonly rely heavily on student engagement with materials and tasks provided online, whilst the teaching element comprises support for students and feedback on assessment tasks rather than delivery of material, which tends to be the focus of 'teaching' in traditional provision,
- Given that online teaching is not reliant on physical space for delivery of learning materials, there is potential for scalability in terms of student numbers.

## STAFFING STRATEGY

As with on campus programmes, online and distance learning programmes must have in place a clear staffing strategy. In order to meet the accreditation standards, the workload model must ensure that the programme is fully staffed with appropriately qualified programme leaders and academics. The programme must also be supported by technical and administrative staff. It will also need support from wider academic staff and stakeholders. Therefore, the following should be given full consideration in order to meet the standards for accreditation:

- The sustainability of the provision(s), especially if reliant on part-time/employed in line with delivery requirements for example on an 'ad hoc' basis by module. .
- Oversight of provisions through putting in place sustainable programme leadership commensurate with Programme Standard 6.1.1.
- Continued Professional Development for staff especially in relation to any technological developments.
- Full technical support for staff across the academic session.

Provisions that have a remote programme team need to make sure that they foster collaborative programme working relationships across the online environment and ensure staff feel included and supported in their roles. This might involve having experienced mentors that staff can draw on if issues arise and having regular programme team meetings. Teaching teams should have opportunities to regularly share good practice and collaborate across modules.

Education providers need to ensure that programme delivery is consistent across the staff base and where providers employ 'ad hoc' module staff, make certain that those staff are sufficiently familiar with the module material including any revisions. This may require training for the delivery of specific modules. The Programme Director should have an overview of the programme to ensure its effective and efficient running. The Programme Director should have a substantial role involving oversight of modules, staff training needs, student and staff engagement and ensure there is an annual review of

course content and assessment as a programme evolves with developments in technology and the discipline (see Programme Standard 2).

### **STAFF STUDENT RATIO (SSR)**

Special consideration may be required for online programmes regarding the following:

- Responsiveness to changes in recruitment (where there is no expected steady state or planned recruitment target).
- FTE calculations for staff and student FTE which are within the required staff student ratio (SSR) level.
- The inclusion of staff in the calculation to cover the varying roles in comparison to on-campus programmes.
- How staff are represented in the Society's SSR Data Capture Tool?
- The data entered into the Tool is authentic and an accurate reflection of the SSR at a particular moment in time (whilst submission of the Data Capture Tool is usually requested for annual monitoring purposes, accreditation visits, significant programme modifications, it can be requested at any time.)

Online programme providers who do not operate on set-target student numbers must provide evidence of how flexible student intake and staffing are managed. This could be through an indicative staffing plan that clearly outlines staff recruitment and response times to changes in student numbers. It could also involve explanation of how pools of specific staff for online delivery are recruited and managed for deployment at short notice. Due consideration should be given to the nature of the contract such staff enter into and how this is managed especially with regard to staff absences/sickness. Staffing must be consistent and in line with the Society's SSR at all times. (see 6.1 above)

The Society's method for calculating SSRs assumes a steady state provision based on target numbers of students with one (or two) intake(s) per year. Whilst these may vary somewhat in traditional providers, fluctuation in student and staff FTEs is more likely for online providers as are multiple intakes. In recognition of the unpredictability of student numbers experienced by many online providers, and in the interest of assuring an accurate snapshot of the SSR to demonstrate that the standard is met. It is acceptable, and indeed desirable, to provide SSR calculations based on student and staff data, covering a retrospective period of one year.

Another assumption is that students typically study their programme on a full-time basis. For online providers, especially those providing flexible, part-time study modes, it may be advantageous to consider module enrolment and delivery as the basis for estimating staff and student FTE. Thus, students enrolled on the programme, but taking a break from studying a module would be excluded from the student FTE.

### **THE CALCULATION OF STAFF FTE**

In line with the staffing outlined in the table above online and distance learning staff roles may vary significantly from camp-based models and therefore these staff roles need to be figured into the SSR calculation.

Full-time or fractional staff employed on a permanent basis should be returned in terms of FTE equivalence to the accredited programme(s). Special consideration needs to be given to contributions

specialist staff who are not directly involved in teaching and assessment of students but who may have responsibility for development, preparation and updating of teaching and learning materials. This work should be included in terms of FTE equivalence based on the number of hours devoted to this, if it is not a full-time but ongoing permanent activity of a member of staff. Alternatively, it may be based on contracted hours to account for such work.

Contracted staff who are not permanent employees of the provider should be returned as FTEs commensurate with the hours contracted out of 1600 hours (equivalent to full-time based on the national contract). For example: A tutor contracted to deliver an online module which runs over 12 weeks and is paid to devote 20 hours each week to module delivery, assessment and associated staff meetings (240 hours) would be returned as .15 FTE.

A tutor contracted to deliver four such modules over the preceding year would be counted as 0.6 FTE.

The Society have encountered online programmes where tutors have been assigned to programme modules based on their expertise in the subject area and their availability during the semester when the module is running. This creates significant issues when trying to record accurate information for individual tutors on the Society's Data Capture Tool (DCT).

As authentic information must be entered into the DCT this should not be simplified in any way. In reality where there is usually a bank of several tutors who could potentially deliver this module then this must be declared, alongside any other teaching commitments (in FTEs) that they have outside of the programme and very significantly if they have teaching commitments at other establishments and on other accredited BPS programmes.

Online providers should enter into the tool, the number of students currently actively studying modules as FTE equivalents and the number of staff currently actively teaching these modules as FTE equivalents, plus any additional staff acting as personal tutors, programme convenors etc. Then they should add in the staff who are specialist content designer and writers as explained previously. Any tutors in a pool who are not currently active, can appear on the spreadsheet, but should have an FTE of 0 recorded. Whilst traditional on campus programmes tend to work on projections and planned student numbers into the future, it is quite clear that this is inappropriate for online providers with flexible, multiple intakes. Therefore where programmes have been running for more than one year they should work with the previous year's real data for the data capture tool.

In all, there should be a plan in place for the academic session that should be forwarded to the Society. The plan should name all individuals that are scheduled to teach on the programmes and their named substitutes. For all contracted staff there should be clear information regarding their other teaching commitments. Any provider experiencing significant problems in completing their DCT should contact their nominated Accreditation Officer who will provide further guidance.

### **CALCULATION OF STUDENT FTE**

Student FTE should be based on credits taken in relation to the overall credit rating of a programme based on normal full-time study expectations. Thus, students taking undergraduate degrees would take 120 credits in each of three years of study. Postgraduate courses (including Master's level conversion courses) would require completion of 180 credits per year for full-time study. Thus an online student in their first year of a 360 credit UG programme (120 credits in each of three years)

taking two 20 credit modules during the course of that year would be counted as .33 FTE for year 1 of the programme. However, a student studying for a Master' level conversion course (180 credits over one year) taking two 20 credit modules would be returnable as .22 FTE. The BPS SSR data capture tool makes provision for entry of student FTE separated into three years of study for undergraduate provision, whereas postgraduate course do not make such a distinction based on the expectation that they are completed in one year of full-time study.

Students who are not enrolled on an accredited programme but take modules belonging to an accredited programme should be returned as 'other' students on a module by module basis, with an FTE as outlined above.

## STAFFING LEVELS

As outlined above online programmes may take a different approach to distributing workload amongst staff to traditional on-campus programmes, with more specialisation in terms of developing materials, delivering teaching and providing personal support to students. This can raise issues around staffing levels with respect to accessibility of staff to students:

- Continuity of student experience which is dependent on a collaborative programme team and adequate staff support (which should be monitored at all times).
- Quality assurance and monitoring of staff activity across the programme at all times.
- Ensuring adequate project supervision from suitably qualified staff cross reference to the standards / SSR guidance.

## SUPERVISION FOR EMPIRICAL PROJECTS

The accreditation standards state very clearly that the empirical project in psychology must be supervised, taught and examined by psychologists or suitably qualified grades and it is important that the requirements be checked across domains before appointing supervisors. It is important that all supervisors are given training in online delivery of a supervision session and not simply assume that it is the same as face-to face on campus delivery. The remote working practices pose significant issues especially with regard to accessibility when things go wrong. Therefore, it is very important that providers ensure that:

- supervisors are not working in isolation;
- the supervisor has the right credentials to meet the accreditation standards;
- supervisors are given the appropriate development and guidelines to ensure they understand the standard of supervision required;
- supervisors are familiar with the operating systems and working of the platform; and
- supervisory training is in place and supervision is monitored to ensure competency. Regular training / webinars and CPD around how to give appropriate feedback and feedforward, etc. should also be provided.

## PROFESSIONAL SERVICES SUPPORT STAFF

Are your psychology technician staff trained in supporting the use of online subject specific resources?

Psychology technician staff need to be appropriately trained to be able to support students and staff in practical and research work. This includes supporting the implementation of online practical work, writing scripts and survey set up for online students. There also needs to be a technical member of staff identified to set up the VLE for programme staff and support and advice to staff and students using the VLE. As the programmes will be online or distance learning then there will be a requirement that there is an increase over and above the standard and in line with the programmes needs and requirements.

### **STAFF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

It is very important that all staff be provided with CPD opportunities. This needs to have a focused attention especially if staff are working remotely. The senior management team must ensure that there are mechanisms in place to track staff CPD. If there is any significant turnover of staff due to the way that contracts are arranged then it will be vital that programmes can show a continual development approach for all staff. There will be differing needs of staff in relation to additional training and CPD to maintain skills for online delivery which will need to be considered and monitored annually. Teaching online and the use of technology has its own pedagogy that should be recognised in all planned CPD activities.

For all staff there will need to be:

- Continuing Professional Development (CPD) (e.g. training for online delivery subject currency and research should be kept up-to-date and monitored regularly), e.g. maintaining subject currency, research etc.
- A programme team workload model, for balancing teaching with individual's CPD.
- A focus on the attendance at conferences for research active staff.
- Annual skills training in online delivery. This includes innovations and new developments in response to course review and programme delivery to enhance the student experience.
- Integration of Professional Services support staff to ensure that they are suitably trained to use and support online (and where applicable campus based) technology. This should include VLE support that is easily accessible for staff in both preparation of materials and their engagement with students. It is also imperative that they have programme content knowledge.

Failure to have a tailored workload and training plan for the programme team in place would be in breach of the Society's accreditation standards.

## PROGRAMME STANDARD 7: DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC RESOURCES

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The education provider must have appropriate discipline specific resources in place to support the effective delivery of the programme.

For online and distance learning programmes, education providers must offer students access to learning resources that are appropriate to the range of theoretical and practical work in which they are engaged. For undergraduate programmes, this is particularly important with respect to teaching research methods and practical work. The provision needs to include software for virtual labs with sufficient support to teach students how to use the software and for students to use these in their individual research projects.

Where there may be limited resources, it is important for programmes to ensure the equality of opportunities and access to resources for online and distance learning students. Programmes should consider the availability of core reading material in an online format and ensure they have enough licences to enable students to access these learning materials.

### PRACTICAL WORK

*What mechanisms are in place to provide students with opportunities to gain practical experience across the core domains?*

Programmes need to think creatively about opportunities for students to collect and analyse data in an online environment and how to facilitate this effectively. For experimental work, experiment design software can be used to get students to carry out experiments and experience research, rather than being provided with the datasets to analyse. Students could also design items for their own questionnaire, circulate it to their cohort and perform factor analysis. For qualitative research, students could be asked to interview each other online via an online communication platform such as Zoom / Teams / Skype, generating qualitative data for them to analyse. Students may conduct an online focus group generating content to be analysed from the discussions.

It is important to foster an online environment where students are willing to participate in each other's projects on a voluntary basis so that each student can gain practical experience of carrying out research.

Consideration also needs to be given to ensuring all requirements for e-learning. In planning this, it is important to be aware that not all students will have the same I.T. access capabilities so support should be robust and staff knowledgeable on a variety of software packages.

### TECHNICAL RESOURCING TO ENABLE PRACTICAL WORK AND STAFFING

With online and distance learning programmes, establishing and maintaining subject-specific technical support can prove a significant challenge. Providers should consider the delivery of virtual laboratory sessions and how these may be supported through virtual learning technology. Particular support and guidance, in the absence of campus based facilities, should be given for data collection and final year project work (during the Covid-19 pandemic this includes all reasonable adjustment in line with the Society's guidance). This could include provision of data analysis software and arrangements should be in place to allow for data collection utilising biological measures (e.g. polar watches).

All technical support should be in line with the accreditation standards. There may be a need for extra support in line with requirements of the programme so different / enhanced support mechanisms should be considered, and where required complemented by appropriately qualified and specialist staff. The staff will be composed of tutors, technicians and qualified support staff (see examples in table p.28–31) with the relevant underpinning knowledge of the tools available to the students during study, and with communication mechanisms designed to facilitate support no less than the quality found on a campus taught programme.

## **PROGRAMME STANDARD 8: QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE**

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The education provider's quality assurance and management systems must make regular provision for the periodic review of the validity and relevance of the programme, such that it continues to reflect our standards, and meets the needs of the programme's stakeholders.

Education providers should be mindful of periodically updating their programmes in line with any changes in standards. Programmes must also continually ensure that their working practices are not out-dated and have processes and procedures for maintaining contemporary learning, research and practice, especially as there is fast placed development and innovation in online delivery methods and resources.

Programmes must also have in place a robust quality cycle to ensure that External Examiner and staff and student feedback is incorporated in an ongoing quality improvement cycle.

### **FACILITATION OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT PROCESSES INVOLVING STUDENTS**

Online and distance learning providers are required to design and maintain effective processes for quality assurance of their programmes and whilst incorporating many technological features for this, it should not simply be reliant upon them. Robust internal quality assurance processes must be in place to both standardise assessment practices and evaluate performance across the programme. It should also include student representation across their portfolio of provision ensuring mechanisms for timely feedback are in place. With students at a distance, this work can be facilitated using online communities, questionnaires, and forums. Engaging with the student body through elected representatives is also a useful way to ensure that a virtuous cycle of meaningful feedback and enhancement can be maintained. Robust structures of governance support this activity from both a course/module through to programme level. Students of online and distance learning providers should have mechanisms and channels for giving informal feedback throughout their programme of study which feeds into the development of the programme. This should include staff and student consultative committees, anonymised student surveys.

### **STANDARDISATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE OF ASSESSMENT:**

Programmes should consider how they ensure equality and robustness across the programmes' assessment practices. This is especially important where new technology has been employed for providing feedback. Programmes must employ mechanisms to standardise their assessors to ensure fairness and equality in the feedback received, and alongside this, how they maintain the consistency. Feedback comments should make students aware of their strengths, weaker areas and anything that has been omitted, so that fully understand how to address the later and improve (this is especially important for formative assessment that is directly linked to summative assessment). The standardisation of assessors is very important especially if assessors are working and marking remotely. There must be opportunities for training and collaboration so that good practice may be shared.

There are special considerations on consistency of marking and feedback when tutors work remotely. There should also be quality assurance mechanisms in place that ensure online feedback is checked for accuracy and compatibility as part of the moderation process where multiple tutors are involved.

## ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT OF QUALITY

*What procedures are in place to ensure the programme continues to monitor effective operations and reflect contemporary learning, research and practice?*

**For all accredited provision, it is essential that all programme, and module changes are submitted to The Society, and agreed before they are implemented, and amended across the VLE.**

It is important for providers to consider how they regularly review and refresh programme infrastructure (delivery platforms / software) and materials (programme content). Good practice includes continual monitoring of any upgrades (especially with security arrangements that are required in line with GDPR and ensuring compliance with the accreditation standards).

There should be set procedures in place for programme staff to review and refresh modules, lectures and other supporting materials to ensure they reflect contemporary learning, research and practice. The programme provider will need to have a clear rationale for the agreed process in place (e.g. yearly review, three yearly review?).

Providers might also find it helpful to implement a process for recording errors. It helps to monitor continually any corrections that have needed to be made, especially where erroneous material has been spotted. This should be entered into the log together with the date that the correction has been made. In some cases, the member of staff preparing content could be different to the staff member delivering the content and a clear process for staff to report errors in content and materials that are in need of correcting or updating is important for programmes delivered online. This would also assist with student queries regarding accidental miss-information.

## STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

*How are Staff and Student Consultative Committees operated remotely?*

It is important that there is a robust process in place for online and distance learning students to feed in to Staff Student Consultative Committees. This could be managed by enabling students to join remotely using technology such as Zoom; Teams; Skype or Blackboard Collaborate or making sure there is a forum for campus-based students to collate and submit comments and feedback gathered from online and distance learning students. Other mechanisms might be through surveys or reporting in. The main concern is that all staff and students are consulted in a robust and fair manner to enable feedback to be incorporated into the programme's quality cycle.

# APPENDIX 1

## USEFUL LINKS

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- [\*Advice on using social media to cope with isolation.\*](#)
- [BPS Coronavirus resources.](#)
- [BPS Cyberpsychology Section.](#)
- [Cyberbullying: What is it and how to stop it.](#)
- [\*Digital adaptations to supervision and observations.\*](#)
- [\*Enhancing quality in a digital environment.\*](#)
- [\*Expert witnesses undertaking remote psychological assessments.\*](#)
- [Living online: The long-term impact on wellbeing.](#)
- [New perspectives on education's digital future.](#)
- [Preserving quality and standards through a time of rapid change: UK higher education in 2020–21.](#)
- [\*Supporting Resource: How UK higher education providers managed the shift to digital delivery during the Covid-19 pandemic.\*](#)
- [Studying online as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic: Assessing the mental health impact on students and staff.](#)
- [The digital transformation of higher education.](#)
- [UK Parliament House of Lords: Private notice question – Higher education.](#)
- [Webinar: Towards the new normal, and beyond.](#)
- [Written statement: Launch of the young person's mental health toolkit.](#)



the british  
psychological society  
promoting excellence in psychology

St Andrews House,  
48 Princess Road East,  
Leicester LE1 7DR, UK

[www.bps.org.uk](http://www.bps.org.uk)

0116 254 9568

[mail@bps.org.uk](mailto:mail@bps.org.uk)

Incorporated by Royal Charter Registered Charity No 229642

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