Common Framework for Online Education

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"Drawing from the evidence of what is known about effective online learning, from national quality frameworks, as well as from the experience and expertise that exists within the University, this Framework draws from a series of principles, design elements and lenses whose purpose is **to enable all programmes to respond to the current context with confidence and competence.***"*

The three purposes of the Common Framework for Online Education

1

To **articulate** feasible ways in which UoS programmes which run wholly or partially online can continue to deliver our strategy and core values.

The development of this Common Framework for Online Education (CFOE) is a pragmatic response to the priority to move at least a proportion of our education online for the academic year 20/21 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Drawing from the evidence of what is known about effective online learning, from national quality frameworks, as well as from the experience and expertise that exists within the University, the Framework draws from a series of principles, design elements and lenses whose purpose is to enable all programmes to respond to the current context with confidence and competence. Where individual contributions, sessions, modules and/or programmes are to be delivered online from the start of the academic year 20/21, they will need to take account of each of these elements in their design, development, and implementation.

2

In **close collaboration** with programmes, schools, and faculties, to provide enhanced agile support and guidance for the development of high-quality online education.

To enable the Framework to be appropriately operationalised within the context of distinct subject areas, bespoke support will be provided to all schools, through close liaison with DHoSE, and a collaborative team drawn from DLT and CHEP (including school-based CHEP champions).

3

To **provide assurance** of that quality for all University stakeholders, including staff, students, and external bodies.

A third purpose of the Framework to ensure close attention is paid to inclusive learning and the need to assure both internal and external quality measures.

The four principles of Online Education at the University of Southampton

UoS Community and Strategy

External

Organisation

School/Faculty

Discipline

Individual

The four principles are nested within the wider UoS community and strategy.

Online education at the University of Southampton:

A key feature of the Framework is that it is firmly embedded within the University of Southampton's own core values – 'One Southampton' - and its education strategy. Defining the principles in this way enables us to maintain the distinctive character of our University and its programmes – these being the reasons why students choose to come and study here. These are the values behind the principle of a shared experience.

As a research-intensive University, we are proud of the quality and value of our research. Not only is this Framework evidence-based, but it promotes the use of evidence and research through all the education we deliver.

In these ways, and more, the Framework can be seen as being nested within the wider University community as it seeks to represent that community through its implementation.

1 Has a clear purpose.
Staff and students will understand what they are hoping to achieve through clear aims and learning outcomes.

2 Is a shared experience.
Through consultation and collaboration, staff and students share ideas and expertise to deliver a connected Southampton experience.

3 Is evidenced based.
It is designed, developed and implemented in ways which are consistent with the evidence of what works.

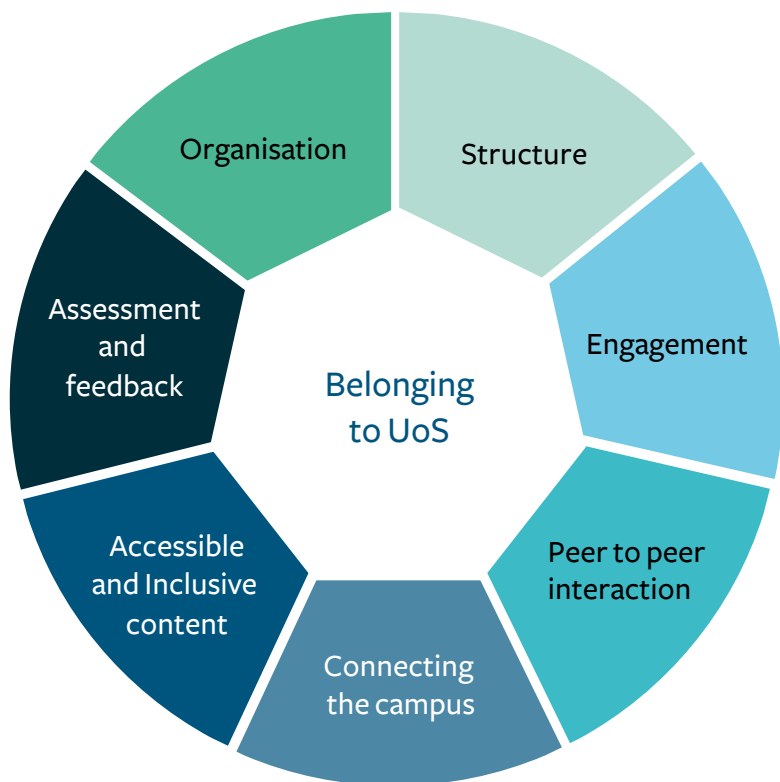## 4 Is enriched and improved.
Ongoing evaluation and review of what works involves students and staff together.

The seven elements of good design - introduction

The seven elements diagram showing: Organisation, Structure, Engagement, Peer to peer interaction, Connecting the campus, Accessible and Inclusive content, Assessment and feedback, surrounding the central concept of Belonging to UoS.

What works in face-to-face settings does not automatically work well online.
This section explores what you can do to shape the design of all your teaching and support students within the online environment.

Before you start working with these seven elements:

Identify the nature and scope of your role in online education delivery – are you designing one session, module or responsible for programme delivery?

Who do you need to work with to make this happen? Who will you influence or get guidance from?

As you undertake your design, keep reflecting on these things, and talk with students, colleagues, and relevant University services such as the Library, iSolutions, Student Services etc.

There is plenty of good advice and support available for staff and students.

The next section explores the seven elements that will help you create a good online design within the scope of your role and contribution.

Organisation

It's important to take the time to plan your overall approach and how you will sustainably deliver your teaching online to set you and students up for success. The plan needs to be realistic and achievable given the time you have to design, develop and implement your course.
It's important to keep your students at the centre of your plan, consider all seven elements of good design and build on what's already working well, aligned to the overall aims of the module and programme.

Structure

Having a well thought out structure has a positive impact on a student's learning experience, confidence and sense of 'place' within their programme.
Making your module or programme learning outcomes explicit will clarify for students where they are going and let them know when they get there.

Modules within the virtual learning environment (VLE) need to be very clearly structured. How to navigate your VLE space and updates need to be regularly communicated to students.

Engagement

This is the key to overcoming the lack of physical proximity. With careful use of both synchronous (live) and asynchronous (not live) activities, you can create a manageable variety of ways for students to engage and ensure that all are included.

If you have any more than 15 or 20 students in a live session, most of them will not get the opportunity to contribute. It can be more effective to save the live sessions for smaller interactive opportunities, offered at varying times of day so all students can join at some point.

Peer to peer interaction

Students place great value on the support they gain from each other. In the absence of physical proximity where they would more easily gather both socially and for their learning, we can help replicate that through the way we facilitate their connections with each other online.

Opportunities directly related to the programme might be to explore ways for students to review each other's work, or the contributions to online discussions and blogs. Setting up chats or channels where your students can 'drop-in' and chat or talk about their learning would be one way to do this, but there's lots of advice available on how to achieve this.

Connecting the campus

Students who have a clear sense of belonging and identity with their programme and their university are more likely to succeed. This will be important for all students, and particularly those joining for the first time into the online environment.

Finding ways to incorporate and profile UoS research and community activities will enhance this sense of connection and belonging.

Accessible and inclusive content

It's important to think carefully about how to deliver your course content in ways which continue to meet the relevant learning outcomes and which are both inclusive and accessible to your students.

This includes providing more than one way for students to interact with the course content. For example long lectures do not work well in the online environment, so providing shorter recordings interspersed with questions, readings, and active tasks will give all your students more than one way to engage with the learning. It can also provide opportunities for additional richness and challenge.
It's also good to keep an open dialogue with your students to find out what's working for them.

Assessment and feedback

Assessments that are delivered face to face may not be suitable for the online environment. The best advice is to think carefully about what your current assessment seeks to achieve and to review recommended online alternatives which achieve the same aims.
The best assessments are ones which are authentic, i.e. that they are meaningful within the context of the subject – its practices and writing conventions.

Four lenses of good design for online learning
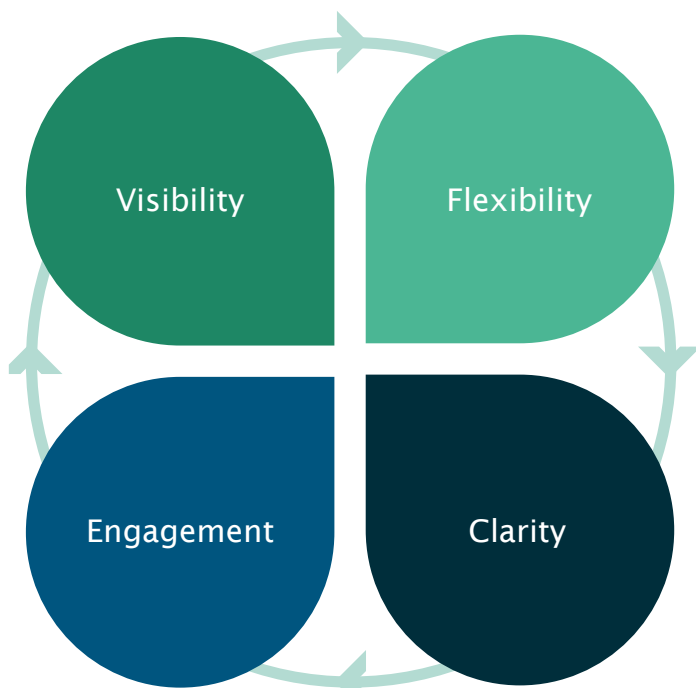
What content, resources, information and skills do I need?

It can be helpful to review the design, development and implementation of online education through four lenses – lenses which help focus on the students' perspective on your design.

A good tip here is to talk through your design with some students and seek their feedback through the perspective of these lenses. It will help ensure that across the range of your contribution, all elements of what makes for a high-quality experience for your students are addressed.

Visibility

Make yourself visible in as many ways as you can, so your students have a clear sense of your 'presence' This might include:

→ Live videos of you and other colleagues, and of campus views. This can be course related, or simply talking about your subject, your research and why you care about it.

→ Regular contributions to discussion boards. This doesn't need to be live, or much. Small, regular contributions, picking up on students' comments, and/or asking further questions keeps you visible to your students.

→ Facilitating ways for students to be visible to each other, for example through chats or channels in Teams that can remain open.

→ Scheduled 'surgeries' where students can drop in to discuss their assignments or their work in general. This could be scheduled like 'office hours' or more structured.

Flexibility

Provide a range of access points to the learning (in terms of timing, sequencing etc.). Provide a clear structure but in ways that students can navigate it to suit their own circumstances, and to enhance their independence in learning.

Reduce barriers to learning with a particular focus on:
→ The diversity of your students and ensure they can all access the learning.

→ The level of accessibility of your materials – there is loads of support available for this, which is often easier to manage in the online space than face to face.

Engagement

→ Provide multiple opportunities for students to be active, both live and in their own time through, for example, discussion boards, Teams meetings (peer and taught), questions, quizzes, drop-ins.

→ Create a programme community that students can identify with and feel loyal towards.

→ Find ways for your students to connect with other parts of the University community, for example through the tasks you ask them to do, the videos you show, etc.

→ Chunk the content and the learning to enable students to stay motivated and actively engaged.

→ Provide stretch and challenge to expand your students' thinking.

→ Provide choices where possible - choice of assessment, of timing, or readings.

→ Find opportunities for dialogue through feedback both to and from students.

Clarity

→ Provide a very clear 'map' of the structure of your contribution/module/programme.
Refer back to it often and stick to it.

→ If possible, repeat similar cycles of structure.

→ Explain why things are organised as they are.

→ Explain the marking criteria, provide exemplars where possible.

→ Explain the links between and across the topics they are learning. Make everything as explicit as possible.

Self referencing questions

The self-referencing questions here are to help you reflect on your design and to check it addresses the seven elements of the Framework. It's recommended that you use them as far as possible in dialogue with students and colleagues.

Organisation

- Have I thought through the **organisation** of my contribution/session/ module or programme, and provided an explanation of it to students on Blackboard for them to refer back to?

- Have I given sufficient **information** on how the rest of the module/ programme will be taught, and how my part fits in?

- Have I included information on how students can **contact** me if they have problems or questions?

Structure

- Have I created a clear and straightforward **structure** to my contribution/ session/module or programme which is explained to students?

Engagement

- Have I considered the **four lenses** that distinguish online from face to face learning from the student perspective?

Peer to peer interaction

- Have I created opportunities each week for students to **engage** with each other in both live and non-live sessions?

Connecting the campus

- Have I included activities which foster **social engagement and community,** both within the programme and the wider University?

Accessible and inclusive content

- Have I reviewed all my materials and sought to amend them in line with the guidance? (Chunked up long lectures, provide a range of active tasks, deployed synchronous and asynchronous sessions appropriately)

- Have I explained the **purpose** of the learning to my students? Am I confident that my design will enable students to achieve my **learning outcomes**? Have I explained that to them?

- Have I sought and followed advice on enhancing the **accessibility** of my materials to ensure an inclusive learning experience for all my students?

- Have I ensured my Blackboard site meets the University good practice guideline, using school and/or faculty templates where they exist?

- Have I piloted the **online tools** which I'm going to use in teaching and checked that my students can access them?

Assessment and feedback

- Am I confident that all my assessments have been **approved** and checked the guidance on how to promote academic integrity?

- Have I provided detailed **information** about the assessment and how feedback will be sought and provided?

- Have I explained how student **feedback** will be gathered in this online environment?

Belonging to UoS

- Have I found ways to tie my contribution/session/module or programme directly into some characteristic of the University?

- Have I **consulted** with relevant colleagues, students, external advisers and university services to help shape the design and delivery of my contribution/ session/module or programme?

Thanks and contact

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