



**Barbados Accreditation Council**



**Code of Practice for the  
Assurance of Educational  
Quality and Standards in  
Distance Education**

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# **Preface**

This document has been prepared by the Barbados Accreditation Council (BAC) to assist educational providers that are offering or seeking to offer educational programmes via distance education modalities in Barbados. It makes available to providers information related to the process of operating in the distance education environment at the post-secondary/tertiary level in Barbados.

Policy related questions should be directed to the office of the BAC. This document will be reviewed and amended, as necessary.

# **The Barbados Accreditation Council**

The Barbados Accreditation Council (BAC) was established in November 2004 by the Barbados Accreditation Council Act, 2004-11. It is a statutory body under the portfolio of the Ministry of Education, Technological and Vocational Training.

## **Vision Statement**

To be a World-class, dynamic quality assurance authority for education and training.

## **Mission Tenets**

The Barbados Accreditation Council will pursue its vision by:

- Providing advisory, administrative, advocacy and quality-assuring services that meet globally recognized standards for quality assurance, and the expectations of our clients.
- Cultivating an environment of highly dedicated and competent staff members who work as a team to create value for our clients and all the communities we serve.
- Undertaking functions and such related activities that would ensure the efficient and effective discharge of our legal, regulatory, and corporate responsibilities.
- Building strong linkages with our sectoral partners to develop a culture of high-quality post-secondary/tertiary education and training in Barbados and beyond.
- Engaging in sound governance, financial management, business, and social responsibility practices to bring sustainable prosperity and benefits to government, directors, staff, social partners, and the communities in which we serve.

# **Code of Practice for the Assurance of Educational Quality and Standards in Distance Education: PART A**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Distance education (DE) has been a prominent feature of the formal educational system for decades. With the advent of new information and communication technologies, research indicates that DE is becoming even more ubiquitous in the post-secondary/tertiary educational environment, particularly those forms of DE supported by the Internet and the World Wide Web. A significant number of these technologies enable learning at a distance either synchronously or asynchronously and also operate in different learning environments: classroom settings or distance education environments.

As technology advances, the number of available providers of post-secondary/tertiary educational offerings continues to increase rapidly. Providers today range from traditional post-secondary/tertiary institutions such as universities, colleges, university colleges to consortia, contracted or brokered arrangements, and virtual universities. DE represents a powerful addition to the growing range of delivery options for post-secondary/tertiary education. Additionally, external quality assurance (EQA)/accreditation agencies must ensure that DE provisions meet the same standards of quality required of traditional educational provisions.

The Code of Practice for the Assurance of Educational Quality and Standards in Distance Education (the Code of Practice) is designed to act as a guide for providers of education and training at the post-secondary/tertiary level programmes/courses in Barbados. The purpose of the Code of Practice and the associated protocols for the assurance of educational quality and standards in distance education is to:

1. facilitate access by learners to educational programmes of the same quality delivered on campus and through DE;
2. facilitate the process through which providers serve learners through DE technology;
3. implement policies and guidelines that guide the provision of educational offerings by post-secondary/tertiary educational programmes using DE technology/media;<sup>1</sup>
4. support existing quality assurance/accreditation mechanisms related to the post-secondary/tertiary educational sector within Barbados;

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<sup>1</sup> Commission for Higher Education, *Policy for Delivering Degree Programs Through Distance Education Technology*, March 1998

5. provide a framework that gives providers the flexibility to maintain the quality of the educational provisions, while adapting their delivery modes to the emerging needs of students and society;<sup>2</sup> and
6. provide a self-assessment framework for providers already involved in distance education.

The Code of Practice supports the other quality assurance and quality enhancement mechanisms developed and implemented by the Barbados Accreditation Council to strengthen the quality of the educational provisions within the national post-secondary/tertiary education and training sectors. It provides a solid reference point for providers as they consciously and systematically seek to assure and enhance the educational quality and standards of their programmes offered via distance education modalities.

In developing the Code of Practice extensive research was conducted in the international post-secondary/tertiary education and training arena and advice was also sought from knowledgeable external quality assurance agency personnel. The Code of Practice is a guide to good practice in the management of learning delivered, supported and/or assessed through distance education. In addition, educational providers may find the Code of Practice useful for developing their own distance education policy and processes.

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<sup>2</sup> Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges Western Association of Schools and Colleges, *Distance Learning Manual*, August 2007

## TERMS DEFINED

- A. *Distance education* denotes a formal teaching/learning process in which the learners and teacher/trainer are separated by distance, resources used to support learning, and/or time. The method of instruction may employ print-based, audio/radio-based, video/television-based, computer-based, satellite-based, Internet-based, or any combination of these delivery modes, or the use of other existing or future forms of information and communication technologies. Instruction may be delivered on or off campus, asynchronously or synchronously. Distance education can include credit or non-credit courses.
- B. *Educational* within the context of the Barbados Accreditation Council refers to education and training.
- C. *Provider* denotes any institution or organisation offering education and/or training programmes of study/courses at the post-secondary/tertiary level in Barbados.

# **Code of Practice for the Assurance of Educational quality and Standards in Distance Education: Part B**

## **PROTOCOLS FOR THE ASSURANCE OF EDUCATIONAL QUALITY IN DISTANCE EDUCATION**

The purpose of the Protocols for the Assurance of Educational Quality and Standards in Distance Education (the Protocols) are set out under eight major headings as follows:

### **Protocol 1: INSTITUTIONAL MISSION**

The educational provider has a clear sense of purpose and direction, which is informed by national priorities and the quality demands of a cost-effective educational provision. Programmes offered via distance education modalities both support and extend the roles of educational providers. They have become increasingly integral to educational providers, with growing implications for institutional infrastructure.

#### **Principles and Processes**

- (a) Evidence that there is a rationale and relevant systems for the use of distance education methods to achieve purpose of the programmes for the target learners.
  - Do the policy statements, strategic plans, slogans or mottoes align with the missions, goals and objectives of the provider?
  - Are the provider's mission statement, goals and objectives clearly set out and fit its operational context?
  - Can the provider or programme management team provide a rationale for the use of distance education modalities in the delivery of the programmes/courses to the targeted learners?
  - Does the provider have in place policy statements and evidence of implementation of policies on all aspects of the design, development, delivery, evaluation, and user support of its distance education programmes?
- (b) Evidence that the programme is consistent with the educational provider's role and mission
  - Is there evidence that the programme(s) is/are consistent with the provider's<sup>3</sup> role, mission and goals?
  - Is the target group (i.e. learners) consistent with the mission?
  - Is there evidence that the programme is consistent with regard to learner access?
  - Is there evidence that the specific needs of the learners for whom the distance education programme is intended are identified and addressed?
  - Is the provider fulfilling its stated role as it offers the programme to students at a distance, or is the role being changed?
  - Do the review and approval processes for the distance education programme ensure that the course and programme objectives are met?
  - Is there a process for the development and/or implementation of shared standards for online content across partners?
- (c) Evidence of compliance with statement of accreditation
  - Does the provider notify the Council in advance of plans to initiate a new delivery mode?
  - Does the programme signify a significant change in accreditation status, if applicable?
  - Does the programme represent a change in the stated mission/objectives of the provider?
  - Is the programme outside institutional boundaries as defined in law, regulation or policy?

<sup>3</sup>(Educational) Provider denotes any institution, or organisation offering post-secondary/tertiary education and/or training programmes/courses within Barbados.



## **Protocol 2: GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION**

Programmes are supported by appropriate and efficient administrative structures for effective policy making and implementation with the necessary human, material/physical and financial resources to achieve their purpose. There is effective, transparent and democratic management of communication and information, as well as human and material resources to support the activities of the provider. Effective planning and evaluation systems are in place to allow the provider to achieve its distance education goals. The educational provider is financially sound and can make reliable educational provision.

### **Principles and Processes**

- (a) The provider's long range planning, budgeting, and policy development processes reflect the facilities, staffing, equipment and other resources essential to the viability and effectiveness of the distance education programme(s).
  - Is there evidence of a plan for sustainability?
  - Is there evidence of fiscal commitment by the provider to distance education programmes?
  - Are there institutional policies in place for admission, enrolment, programme establishment, approval, review, funding, management, programme completion, quality assurance/accreditation, etc.?
  - Is there evidence of monitoring procedures to ensure that all policies are implemented, evaluated and amended as necessary?
  - Is there evidence of appropriate integration of distance education programmes into the provider's administrative structures, as well as its planning and oversight mechanisms?
- (b) The provider possesses the equipment and technical expertise required for distance education.
  - Institutional technical, physical plant, staff and support infrastructure
    - Is the institutional infrastructure sufficient to address technical support (e.g. server space, redundancy or load balancing, technical help desk, Internet access, etc.)?
    - Is there evidence of reliability of technical services (e.g. back-up, remote services, etc.)?
    - Does the institution have an information and communication technology (ICT) plan for the use of ICT, maintenance, upgrades, etc?
    - Is the technical infrastructure appropriately staffed?
    - Do technical and physical plant facilities accommodate curricular commitments?
    - Are there provisions for reliability, privacy, safety and security of facilities provided directly by the provider or through contractual or other arrangements?
- (c) Institutional Organisation
  - Proper accountability structures and mandates for responsible officers are in place.
  - Mechanisms are in place to prevent staff from using their positions of power within the institution to generate revenue for personal benefit or double payment for the same work.
  - The provider's distance education policies are clear concerning faculty compensation, copyright issues, and the use of revenue derived from the creation and production of software, courseware, or other media products.
  - There is a clearly defined process of programme design, development, approval, and review.
  - When a provider contracts for educational services, it retains responsibility for the educational quality and integrity of the programme.
  - There exists defined institutional support and processes for faculty<sup>4</sup> development and instructional design.

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<sup>4</sup> Faculty shall include teachers, trainers, and instructors.

- Policy statements and implementation methods are recorded, readily available and fully understood by members of staff.
- There is a clearly identified individual(s), or unit/organization that coordinates student support services for distance education. This includes dissemination of information to learners about the programmes of study e.g. programme specifications, course handbooks, module or unit guide, course schedules, delivery of study materials, assessment of work, course outline/syllabus, etc.
- The provider has policies for periodic reviews of the educational aims and intended learning outcomes of the distance education programme(s).
- A process to assure copyright compliance and the institutional copyright policy is current and distributed to all constituents.
- There exist institutional policies which delineate responsibility for distance education and mainstream academic programmes, where both types of programmes are offered.
- Effective marketing strategies are incorporated.
- Strategies for programme assessment and evaluation are defined and results are incorporated into programme revisions.
- Technologies are appropriate to content delivery and student learning.
- The provider has a financial structure and systems in place to support programmes delivered via distance education modalities.
- There is a defined process in place to provide adequate training and support for staff and learners.
- There is a structure in place to communicate how alternative forms of delivery would come into effect in the event of failure of the principal delivery system.
- The provider employs academically and experientially qualified faculty to oversee instruction, evaluation, and grading requirements of distance education programmes and courses.
- There are effective systems for communication with current and prospective learners, governance structures, all staff and course tutors, as well as key external organisations.

(d) Articulation and transfer

- Articulation and transfer policies exist and are current.
- Articulation agreements and/or guidelines exist.
- The agreements and implementation are consistent across institutional departments.

(e) Technical Framework

- Does the provider have a structure in place to communicate changes in software, hardware or technical systems to faculty and learners?
- Is a training programme available for staff, including instructors/faculty?
- Is training accessible by distance education learners?

(f) Hardware, Software and Technical Support

- Is the help desk available 24 X 7? If not, are the hours of operation clearly stated and disseminated?
- Are adequate systems in place?
- How is the range of software/hardware monitored and supported?
- Are technical expectations clearly articulated?
- Are FAQs available and applicable?
- Are minimum technology requirements for participation in the courses clearly defined and disseminated?

### **Protocol 3: CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

Methods change, but the standards of quality endure. The important issues are not technical but curriculum-driven and pedagogical. The form and structure of the programmes encourage access and are responsive to changing environments. Major decisions are made by qualified faculty and focus on learning outcomes for an increasingly diverse student population. The preparation of distance education materials differs from the preparation of materials for the traditional classroom setting, as such, questions of ownership, copyright and fair use must be addressed. Policies will need to be developed that do not undermine faculty rights or the learning/teaching process, as well as address issues of copyright, ownership, fair use, and faculty compensation.

#### **Principles and Processes**

- (a) The faculty assumes responsibility for and exercises oversight over distance education, ensuring both the rigour of the programmes and the quality of instruction.
- Evidence of approval process:
    - Board/management level
    - department/faculty level
    - college level
    - institutional level
    - national level
    - other
  - Academically qualified persons:
    - defined learning outcomes
    - developed appropriate curriculum
    - determined assessment criteria
    - participated in the design and approval processes
    - defined the percentage of the online programme available asynchronously e.g. 100/90-99/80-89/70-79/60-69/under 60
  - Record is available of the percentage of course content created by:
    - Full-time academically qualified faculty/instructor
    - Part-time academically qualified faculty/instructor
    - Work-for-hire content experts
    - Third-party agencies e.g. publishing company, software company, other educational institution, etc.
    - Other (explain)
  - Record is available of the percentage of courses that are taught by institutional faculty/instructors
    - tenured or full-time
    - adjuncts
    - part-time
    - Third Party Agencies
    - Learner Assistants, Graduate Assistants or Teaching Assistants
    - Other
  - Programme/Course development, design and approval
    - staff have appropriate skills – technical competence and pedagogical expertise
    - the programme is a part of the provider's mission and plans
    - guidelines regarding minimum standards are used for course development, design and delivery
    - instructional materials are reviewed periodically to ensure that they meet programme quality

standards

- courses are designed to require learners to engage themselves in analysis, synthesis and evaluation as part of the course and programme requirements
- the provider ensures that each distance education programme results in learning outcomes appropriate to the rigour and breadth of the qualification awarded
- the content and credits of distance education programmes are the same as on-campus programmes
- outcomes, content, teaching and learning strategies and assessment methods of the distance education programme are aligned and appropriate for the level and purpose of the programme
- where appropriate, placement in a work-based environment should be an essential component of professional and vocational distance education programmes
- the courses comprising the programme of study are integrated and appropriately sequenced
- the delivery method is appropriate for the learners and the curriculum
- instructional methodology is consistent with stated outcomes and appropriate for the course(s)
- programme design reflects the importance of appropriate interaction (asynchronous or synchronous) between instructor and learners and among learners
- programme approval procedures meet the requirements of the relevant bodies and allow for innovation and flexibility
- where programmes are exported, procedures are established for reviewing legal programme approval requirements and requirements under local law in respect of relevant matters including consumer protection, copyright, employment, packaging, and postal dispatch

▪ Quality Assurance and Articulation

- wherever possible, programmes allow for flexible exit points
- assessment is linked to accreditation based on the requirements of external quality assurance agencies, where appropriate
- clear and effective monitoring and evaluation procedures are in place for the programmes (internal and external review)
- review findings are appropriately disseminated and used for staff development, curriculum improvement and increasing learner access
- where a programme is being discontinued, the provider ensures that its commitments to the learners registered on the programme are met
- there is a timetable for the regular revision and updating of distance education programmes/courses, taking into consideration feedback from learners, faculty and advances in knowledge and research
- learners are made aware of credit requirements of the programmes and possibilities for transfer to other programmes

(b) The provider's distance education policies are clear concerning ownership and fair use of materials

(c) The provider ensures that the technology used is appropriate to the nature and objectives of the programme(s)

- learning outcome determines the technology used to deliver course content
- technology selection is based on appropriateness for the learners and the curriculum
- technology used is current and appropriate to the programme/course objectives

(d) The provider ensures that the delivery systems for the DE programme or element of study are appropriate for the environment in which learners are expected to work.

- Learners are assured that any DE programme or element of study has had its delivery system tested and that contingency plans are in place should there be a failure of the designed modes of delivery.
- Delivery system for DE programmes is fit for purpose and has appropriate availability and life expectancy.
- Delivery of programme/course materials to learners is secure, reliable, and there is a means to confirm

that they were received safely.

(e) Programme Requirements

- Communication of programme requirements is appropriate for the learners' location, access to technology, timeframe, etc.
- Alternatives are available if students must discontinue a programme?
- Learners are advised "at the outset" of programme, technical, financial, and time commitments.
- Career opportunities and certification parameters are clearly and honestly communicated.
- Programme design involves the demonstration of skills such as critical thinking, analysis, comprehension, communication and effective research.
- The amount of material covered in the distance education course and the depth of coverage is equal to that of the classroom-based course.
- The curricular content and learning experiences are appropriate for delivery through distance education.
- The provider ensures the currency of materials, programmes and courses.
- All new and/or substantially modified programmes offered by providers located in Barbados must undergo the programme approval process available through the Barbados Accreditation Council.

(f) Procedures are established to ensure that on a case-by-case basis a full distance education programme (e.g. undergraduate or postgraduate degree) is available to learners who are genuinely unable to participate in classroom education at any time.

(g) The educational aims and intended learning outcomes of a distance education programme are reviewed periodically for their continuing validity and relevance.

(h) Consortium/Collaborative Agreements

- There exist plans/criteria for selecting consortia partners and contractors, as well as the means to monitor and evaluate their work.
- Consortium agreements also address issues that assure enhancing services to learners.
- Consortium agreements which exist are clearly defined and the different type(s) are indicated e.g. Web Instructional Authorware/Framework; Programme management and delivery; Library Consortia; Technical Agreements; Bookstore Agreements; Administrative Services; Course/degree programme materials; Online payment arrangements; learner privacy; etc.
- Quality assurance facilities are clearly stated.
- Performance expectations are defined in contracts and agreements.
- The provider has adequate quality control and curriculum oversight written in the contract.
- Conditions for contract termination are clearly defined.
- Redundancy and/or backup services are guaranteed.
- Training provisions and staffing are adequately defined.
- Fiscal arrangements are specified and are beneficial.
- Agreements clearly state who awards degrees/credit.
- Curriculum decision-making process is clearly outlined.
- Where providers offer programmes developed externally, there are clear procedures for programme approval in which the quality assurance requirements of both provider and the external body readily fit together.
- For collaboratively delivered programmes, the responsibility for performance remains with the awarding provider.
- Articulation agreements exist as appropriate:
  - Is the articulation agreement determined by participating providers?
  - Is the articulation agreement determined by state/government agencies?
  - Is the articulation agreement determined by other? Define.

- (i) Programmes provide for timely and appropriate interaction between learners and faculty and among learners.
  - Evidence of Interaction
    - Learner to learner
      - email
      - online chat facilities
      - discussion groups/threaded discussions
      - phone or streaming audio
      - cyber buddies/mentors
      - tutors
      - evaluation
      - other
    - Learner and faculty
      - email
      - faculty-led discussion/threaded discussions
      - chat rooms
      - virtual or synchronous “office hours”
      - streaming audio
      - telephone/fax
      - voicemail
      - postal service mail
      - other
  - Evaluation of interaction
    - assessment instrument employed (summative)
    - monitoring software incorporated in course delivery (formative)
    - Assessment results applied to new programme design or delivery
  - Feedback to learner assignments and questions is constructive and provided in a timely manner.

#### **Protocol 4: LEARNING AND INFORMATION RESOURCES**

For a successful and supportive distance education programme, the availability and use of appropriate, equivalent and sometimes personalised learning resources are essential. Many institution’s libraries are technologically capable of supporting learners at a distance, however, orientation and training are important components of effective use of all resources for learning by the learner. Special local arrangements may be necessary for learners to facilitate access to learning and information resources.

#### **Principles and Processes**

- (a) The provider ensures that faculty and learners have access to and can effectively use appropriate learning and information resources.
  - Related instructional materials are appropriate and readily accessible to students.
  - Access to library and related services are clearly stated
  - Faculty and learners are informed about how to access the library and related services.
  - Distance education learners have access to all possible electronic research material.
  - Arrangements are in place to facilitate ready acquisition of books and materials by learners as needed.
  - Training is available to faculty and learners in the use of learning and information resources.

(b) Evidence of the availability of learning resources

- The institution monitors whether learners make appropriate use of learning and information resources.
- The institution provides laboratories, facilities, and equipment appropriate to the courses or programmes.
- The delivery of study materials to students is secure and reliable and there is a means of confirming its safe receipt.

(c) Learning resources meet specified expectations of the institution in respect of the quality of teaching and learning support materials for a programme or element of study leading to a particular award.

**Protocol 5: FACULTY SUPPORT**

Staff and faculty roles are becoming increasingly diverse and reorganised. For example, the same person may not perform both the tasks of course development and direct instruction to learners. Regardless of who performs which of these tasks, important issues are involved.

**Principles and Processes**

(a) The institution provides appropriate faculty support services specifically related to distance education.

- Institutional policies pertaining to faculty
  - recruitment, selection, and training for distance education programmes.
  - workload assignment and monitoring exist and are consistent.
  - release time for course development are available and consistently applied.
  - compensation exist and are consistently applied.
  - institutional grants or awards are available for development of electronically delivered programs.
  - intellectual property exist and faculty are aware of these policies.
- Institutional professional evaluation policies are inclusive of course design, development, delivery and instruction of electronically offered programs.
- Policies for distance education are consistent with on-campus policies.
- The number of full-time and/or part-time staff is sufficient to provide for the needs of the learners.

(b) Technical, design and production support for faculty:

- Instructional design/course materials development support services
- Qualified instructional design staff are available
- Faculty development workshops and training are adequate and available
- Attention is given toward sound pedagogical and andragogical principles
- Consulting and programme design services are available, as necessary
- General instructional support services are adequate and available
- Technical support is accommodating to faculty
- Where necessary, unique or additional instructional support is made available for faculty teaching electronically delivered courses
- Video or graphic support is available
- Software, network and hardware are appropriate for electronic instruction
- Systems for the dissemination of newly acquired skills and information
- Other

(c) The institution provides appropriate orientation and training for faculty who teach in distance education programmes.

- Support for Course Design and Management
  - Are faculty orientation and training programmes available on an as needed basis?
  - Are faculty involved in “Advisory Councils” or “User Groups” or other venues to provide fora for pedagogical or instructional discussions?
  - Are the institutional expectations for course design and development feasible given available faculty and institutional support?
  - Is there institutional support for “early adopters”?
  - Does the institution demonstrate support for course upgrade and on-going management?

(d) There is an effective performance management and appraisal system for all staff.

(e) Support for “Teaching” Faculty and those involved in direct service to learners

- Criteria exist for selection of instructors that are proficient in the various distance education communication technologies used in distance education programmes.
- Teaching faculty are competent in the design of distance education programmes.
- Training and orientation programmes exist for new distance education instructional faculty to acquire competence in the design and delivery of distance education programmes.
- Mentors are available for faculty new to teaching distance education courses.
- Training and technical support services are adequate for faculty teaching via distance education modalities.
- Faculty is informed about training.

(f) Support for other persons involved in delivery of the distance education programme

- Qualifications of persons involved in the delivery of distance education programmes are appropriate to the responsibilities of those persons.
- Job descriptions of staff are appropriate for the educational services provided.
- Tutors or learner mentors who assist the principal instructor with programme delivery have the appropriate qualifications and expertise.
- Staff development programmes equip staff to perform their roles and tasks effectively.

## **Protocol 6: LEARNER SUPPORT**

Institutions have learned that today’s learners are different, both demographically and geographically, from learners of previous generations. These differences affect everything from admissions policy to library services. Reaching these learners, and serving them appropriately, are major challenges to today’s institutions. Learners need information before they start their programme of study to enable them to make appropriate preparations for a distance education approach and to plan the management of their time. It is important that access to learning for the physically challenged student is provided for and clearly stated in the distance education programme. The institution may need to consider special services or additional equipment for these students. Learners should therefore be provided with a range of opportunities for authentic two-way communication through the use of various forms of technology in the distance education environment.

### **Principles and Processes**

(a) Institutional commitment to programme continuation

- Does the programme effectively address needs/demographics of student population?
- Do programme plans, communications and infrastructure reflect institutional commitment?

(b) Prior to admission into the programme, prospective learners should receive clear, complete and timely information; realistic explanations of the expectations placed upon them for study of the distance education



programme or elements of study, as well as the nature and extent of the autonomous, collaborative and supported aspects of learning.

- Admission requirements
- Technical equipment requirements and technical help
- Programme/course requirements
- Computer skills required for the course (technological competence and skills)
- Costs and payment policies
- Financial aid options (where available)
- Curriculum design, delivery and timeframe
- Schedule of available learner support services
- Nature of faculty/student interaction
- Criteria for assessment/programme completion
- Academic advising
- Catalogue, prospectus, or other document that clearly describes the component units/elements or modules of the distance education programme or element of study, to show the intended learning outcomes, teaching, learning and assessment methods of the programme or element of study
- Credit transfers
- Other

(c) The institution provides adequate access to the range of student services appropriate to support the programme. These services should be available without the learner having to visit the physical campus location.

- Institutional information
- Pre-registration advising
- Admissions
- Course registration
- Financial aid application/confirmation (where available)
- Tuition payment
- Academic advising
- Tutoring or academic support
- Career counselling and placement
- Library and/or other media Resources
- Technical assistance (24X7)
- Bookstore (where available)
- Clear schedule for the delivery of the course/study materials to learners and for assessment of their work
- Modes and opportunities for inter-learner discussions
- Access to documents that set out the responsibilities of the awarding institution and programme presenter for the delivery or support of a DE programme or element of study
- Other

(d) Learners have access to documents that set out their own responsibilities as learners, and the commitments of the institution and/or support provider for the support of the distance education programme or element of study. They also have access to clear and up to date information about the learning support available to them locally and remotely for their DE programme or elements of study.

- face-to-face meetings
- online support
- counselling support
- administrative support
- opportunities available to support student learning and the frequency of these opportunities
- expected response times from technical support
- technical requirements for e-modes of learner support
- modes of required or optional attendance

- ground rules for communication with other learners, faculty, and tutors
- (e) The institution provides students with information on distance education staff
  - support staff have appropriate skills (technical competence and pedagogical expertise)
  - staff have received appropriate training and development
  - identified contact person, either local or remote
- (f) The institution provides an adequate means of resolving complaints or appeals from learners
  - complaints procedure
  - appeals process
- (g) The institution provides to learners advertising, recruiting and admissions information that adequately and accurately represents the programmes, requirements, and services available.
- (h) Academic support and contact sessions are built into the design of the course.
- (i) Sense of Community
 

The institution clearly demonstrates a belief that distance education students are part of the academic community.

  - Is there a published statement of the provider's commitment to learner's and how this commitment will be measured?
  - Is there a special page or portal for distance education students? OR
  - Are services integrated into campus services with easy access for all?
  - What evidence exists that distance education students feel part of a learning community?
  - Other

## **Protocol 7: EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT**

Assessment is an essential feature of the teaching and learning process and is an integral component of the teaching and learning process. Both the assessment of learner achievement and evaluation of the overall programme take on added importance as new techniques evolve. Assessment methods are appropriate to the purpose and outcome of the programmes, properly managed, and meet the requirements of the external quality assurance agency. For example, in asynchronous programmes the element of seat time is essentially removed from the equation. For these reasons, the institution conducts sustained, evidence-based and participatory inquiry as to whether distance education programmes are achieving the stated objectives. The results of such inquiry are used to guide curriculum design, delivery, pedagogy, and educational processes, which may affect future policy and budgets and perhaps have implications for the provider's roles and mission.

### **Principles and Processes**

- (a) Assessment of student achievement
  - In what ways is the provider documenting the assessment of learner achievement in the courses?
    - online tests, quizzes,
    - monitoring of students' time on task vs. performance
    - participation in discussion groups, chats, threaded discussions
    - projects, homework, papers
    - student self-assessment
    - peer assessment
    - assessment of class performance on individual questions/responses
    - student performances or productions
    - learner assessment of faculty performance
    - learner assessment of the programme(s)
    - other
  - How does evaluated learners' performance compare to intended learning outcomes?
- (b) The expected level of achievement for distance education learners should be as challenging as that expected

of classroom-based learners.

- learners are informed on the ways in which their achievements will be assessed (methods of assessment, criteria for marking and grading, and rules and regulations for progression, final awards and classifications);
- learners are informed of the relative weighting of units, modules or elements of the programme in respect of their overall assessment;
- learners have access to timely formative assessment on their academic performance to provide a basis for individual constructive feedback and guidance, and to illustrate the provider's expectations for summative assessment.

(c) The institution ensures the integrity of student work and the credibility of the qualifications and credits it awards.

- Are steps taken to limit the possibility of fraud and abuse in a distance education environment?
- Do procedures exist for identifying proctors?
- Do guidelines exist for administering proctored exams?
- Are physical learning centres or partnerships utilized for testing?
- Is there a means of assuring learner identity and original work?
- Are examination measurements secure from tampering or contamination?
- Are students assured that their assessed work is properly attributed to them?
- Are the mechanisms for the transfer of student work directly to assessors secure and reliable?
- Is there a means of providing or confirming the safe and timely receipt of a student's work?
- Are students advised to keep copies of the work they transfer for assessment?
- Are learners given clear instructions on the format and security measures to adopt when sending their work electronically?

(d) Personal Information Security

- Are safeguards in place to protect personal information?
- Are protocols in place for granting appropriate access to evaluation data?

(e) The provider evaluates the overall educational effectiveness of its distance education programmes to ensure comparability to campus-based programmes.

- Assessment of student learning outcomes
- Assessment of student retention rates
- Assessment of student and faculty satisfaction e.g. Are exit interviews conducted and incorporated in programme evaluation? Are regular satisfaction surveys conducted?
- Is there a "capstone" course?
- What measure of student competence is utilized for communication skills, comprehension, and analysis?
- Is there an assessment of library and/or learning and information resources utilization?
- Is there evidence that student satisfaction inventories for support services are used and results incorporated into programme planning?
- Is the programme reaching the "intended audience"?
- Is the budget revenue and expenditures as expected and clearly related to programme goals?
- Is there data on enrolment, costs and successful/innovative uses of technology?
- Are regular reviews of intended learning outcomes to ensure clarity, utility and appropriateness conducted?

(f) Continuous self-evaluation geared towards programme improvement

- Programme outcomes have been impacted by the assessment (retention, student interaction, curriculum changes, cost, etc.)
- Effective use of technology to improve pedagogy
- Faculty are academically qualified and evaluated
- Development and conduct of the institution's assessment and improvement programme
- Impact of programme evaluation on institutional planning
- Programme evaluation is reported and acted upon by the provider

- Has the programme had measurable results?
  - Other
- (g) Evaluation of distance education programmes is consistent with institutional evaluation of all academic programmes.
- Are the processes for evaluation the same?
  - Are there unique evaluative methods for programmes delivered through the various distance education modalities? (Explain)
  - Quality assurance/accreditation strategies are integrated into the design of distance education programmes e.g.
    - Faculty credentials, selection and training;
    - Time-on-task measures (e.g. minimum weeks for courses, monitoring of course log-ins, etc.);
    - Student support services and consumer information;
    - Assessment of institutional goals and outcomes;
    - Measurement of student learning outcomes;
  - Distance education programmes are included in the overall accreditation process.
- (h) The institution assesses learner capability to succeed in distance education programmes and applies this information to admission and recruiting policies and decisions.
- (i) The programme's educational effectiveness and teaching/learning process is assessed through an evaluation process that uses several methods and applies specific standards. For each programme there is at least one integrated assessment procedure which is a valid test of the key purposes of the programme.
- (j) There are effective procedures for recognising prior learning and for assessing current competence.
- (k) Where distance education delivery occurs between countries, assessment activities are designed and administered to ensure that learners are not disadvantaged in a range of contexts.
- (l) There is consistency in the grading/marking procedures for both formative and summative assessments.
- (m) There are clear procedures for the receipt, recording, processing and return of assignments to learners within a timeframe which allows learners to benefit from formative feedback prior to the submission of further assessment tasks.
- (n) Effective arrangements are in place to ensure that the integrity of certification processes is not compromised.

## **Protocol 8: QUALITY ASSURANCE AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT**

There is an integrated framework at a policy and practice level that informs a clear cycle of planning, implementing, monitoring, reflection, and action to ensure that learners' and staff needs as well as the needs of other clients are met.

### **Principles and Processes**

- (a) The provider ensures that daily activities are aligned with its mission, goals, principles and policies in relation to national and/or regional priorities.
- (b) Internal quality assurance processes are articulated with external processes laid down by the relevant quality assurance body/ies.
- (c) There is a clear cycle of planning, development, documentation, report, action and review of policy and procedures.
- (d) There are systems and processes in place to ensure that dedicated support is given to quality assurance and quality enhancement activities.
- (e) Educational aims and intended learning outcomes of the DE programme(s)/course(s) are reviewed periodically to ensure continuing validity and relevance.
- (f) For electronically offered programmes, mechanisms for monitoring learner participation and performance are designed into the technical platforms used in electronically delivered programmes. For example, systems may be designed to track

- the time spent by different learners on components of the materials;
  - the sequence of choices made by learners in accessing web-based files; or
  - learner participation in online discussions.
- (g) There are systems and processes in place to ensure that DE programmes or elements of study are subject to the same rigour of quality assurance as any other type(s) of programmes offered by the educational provider.
- (h) The provider engages in benchmarking and uses appropriate monitoring and evaluation techniques to gather and analyse data to use as a basis for setting priorities and planning for quality enhancement/improvement.
- (i) There are demonstrable processes and ongoing efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning according to priorities identified through monitoring and evaluation processes.
- (j) Staff development is a fundamental strategy to promote quality service provision.
- (k) Staff, learners, and other clients/constituents are given opportunities to participate in the process of quality assurance, quality review and quality enhancement.
- (l) There are clear routines and systems for quality assurance and quality enhancement and staff are familiar with those that relate to their work.
- (m) Quality management mechanisms are in place to ensure that exported or imported programmes are of equivalent quality offered in Barbados, and that there is compliance with the quality criteria and other requirements of the national external quality assurance body or the importing country.

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