

Short Online Courses



Approval and Monitoring of Short Online Courses

[For the purposes of the processes described in this document, in Henley Business School, references to 'School' should be taken to include 'programme area' and references to 'School Director of Teaching and Learning' should be taken to mean 'Director of Studies'.

References to the OOC Steering Group have been changed to the Online Courses Advisory Group (OCAG), which was approved by DELT as of 25 April 2019. The title of the Open Online Courses Programme has also been changed to distinguish this from full UG/PG programmes (OCAG, 23 September 2022) to Short Online Courses (OC) Programme to include private, internal online courses for UoR students.]

Scope of guidelines

1. These guidelines and the accompanying templates were developed by the Working Group on Quality Assurance and Enhancement for Open Online Courses (OOCs) during the Spring Term 2015. Revisions were made in the Summer Term 2016. They were informed by the Statement on Massive Open Online Courses, which was published by the Quality Assurance Agency in 2014, and by Chapter B1: Programme design, development and approval and Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which served as useful reference points in adapting the University's quality assurance processes to the approval and monitoring of OOCs. Further revisions were made in Autumn Term 2020 to reflect the ongoing refinement and development of the University's Online Course design, production and impact evaluation processes, change in governance from the OOC Steering Group to the Online Courses Advisory Group (OCAG) and the introduction of the Online Courses Programme Strategy (Approved by OCAG Autumn Term 2020).
2. Credit-bearing Online Courses (OCs) will conform to the normal University approval and monitoring processes for credit-bearing modules. These guidelines specifically apply to non-credit bearing online courses, which are not required to adhere to the standard processes and will not be subject to formal scrutiny by QAA review processes. The procedures detailed in this document are intended to ensure that proposals for new online courses align with the Short Online Course Programme

Strategy. They are also intended to ensure that Schools are given an opportunity to routinely monitor their OC provision and to reflect on ways in which those courses might be enhanced.

3. These guidelines apply to UoR branded and co-branded OCs which are managed by the University OC team.
4. Attached to this document are:
 - a. The Framework of Short Online Courses 2022-2024 (annex 1)
 - b. Updated *Online Courses Business Case Template* (Annex 2);
 - c. *Online Course Evaluation Report Template* (Annex 3); and
 - d. *OACG membership and terms of reference 2022-2023* (Annex 4).

Procedure for the development and approval of a Short Online Course

5. The procedure for the development and approval of an OC begins in one of two ways:
 - 5a. The OC Programme Manager approaches an Educator* and/or Head of School/Function with a suggested proposal for a new online course, possibly in collaboration with an external partner, that aligns with one or more of the strategic objectives specified in Table 1. within the Framework for Short Online Courses Programme 2022-2024, appended to this document (Annex 1).
 - 5b. Proposer(s) (Educator) of the lead School/Function approaches the OC Programme Manager to discuss their idea for a potential new course; possibly in line with a bid for research funding, in collaboration with an external partner, or on the recommendation of a Head of School/Function, Teaching and Learning Dean or similar, to discuss whether or not it aligns with one or more of the strategic objectives specified in Table 1. within the Framework for Short Online Courses Programme 2022-2024.
6. If the proposal aligns with the Framework for the Online Courses Programme, and there is capacity within the OC team to support the project within the requested timeline, the OC Programme manager will ask the Lead Educator to complete an OC Business Case proposal form (Template included in Annex 2). This document asks the Educator to summarise the course rationale, objectives, target audience, timeline, and details regarding possible funding sources. It also asks for written confirmation from their Head of School/Function they are supportive of the project proceeding and the ongoing investment of the Lead Educator's time in creating and continuing to support the course during its lifetime (2years minimum). The OC Programme Manager will review the completed proposal, and if necessary, suggest any final changes and/or refinements.
7. The OC Programme Manager will submit the completed Business Case proposal together with their recommendations, to the Online Courses Advisory Group (OACG), for review and feedback.

Post-approval

8. Following the decision of the OC Programme Manager, a Digital Learning Producer is appointed to collaborate with the Educator, and lead on the project scoping, course design, course development and production of the online course. A second Digital Learning Producer is assigned to the project for QA and continuity purposes and the development is overseen by the Online Courses Programme Manager through weekly meetings.
9. The OC team use the Scoping Document Template to confirm: the overall rationale, target audience, key objectives and how these will be measured during the course evaluation process. The DLP specifies a timetable for the course development and launch, taking into account School requirements, external events, and the platform provider's schedule. Educators formally approve the finished scoping document and course development schedule via email/ meeting.
10. The OC team and Educators meet to develop the online course structure based on the agreed target audience and objectives in the scoping document. This session, led by the OC team will use pedagogic principles to ensure an excellent learner experience, by implementing best practice in online learning design.
11. The Educator, and any other Educator team members develop the OC content. They may be based in one or more Schools/subject areas, but one School will be identified as the lead School. One of the Educators will take on the role of 'Lead Educator' and will assume overall responsibility for developing the course content including writing the content, overseeing the smooth-running of the course and interacting with learners and mentors as appropriate. The Lead Educator's School is responsible for approving both the quality and the academic rigour of the material provided.
12. The Educators will receive guidance and support from the OC team, who will help to ensure that the structure of the course, balance of learning activities and content are tailored for the online platform and appropriate for the intended audience(s). The OC team will also ensure the online content is accessible and follows UoR Online Courses house style and will provide guidance and support where necessary.
13. With guidance from the OC team, Educators are responsible for obtaining permission for all third-party materials. Records must be provided for each permission clearance, to be stored centrally by the OC team.
14. The Educators will update their School on course development progress and ensure the School's satisfaction with the academic content of the OC. The Educators may ask colleagues within their department to act as reviewers for the course content. The OC team will also quality check the OC content and discuss any feedback with the Educators.
15. The platform provider(s) may also conduct quality checks on OC content or request a self-directed QA form is completed. These checks typically focus on accessibility, technical aspects, pedagogy and branding requirements. The University should not, however, rely on these as the sole quality assurance check.
16. Where issues are identified by any of these parties, these are resolved by the OC Team and Educators prior to the release of the OC.
17. The OC team in consultation with the Educators may identify a mentor team to monitor and respond to queries in the course discussion areas during a set facilitation period. Facilitation training will be provided by the OC team and mentors will also be guided by the code of conduct provided by the platform(s).

18. The OC is released according to the previously agreed schedule and monitored by the Educator team or a supervised mentor team.
19. The release of the OC is reported to the OCAG and within regular CQSD updates and by the lead Educator to the relevant School Management Board.

Modifications to the approval process

20. Any requests to re-use materials from an online course for another purpose must be approved by the OC team who may request that a formal agreement is put in place. The OC team will check for copyright requirements and recommend the appropriate wording and branding for credit.
21. Where this request includes adapting or translating the materials, the OC team may request oversight of the adapted materials or further assurances around the quality of the translation process.

Monitoring of Short Open Online Courses

22. A dedicated member of the OC team completes an in- depth evaluation of every first run of a new online course. This process is based on quantitative (e.g., overarching statistics) and qualitative data (e.g., learner comments) to identify key achievements, review the success of the course against objectives and plan any aspects of the course that could be improved. An evaluation document is generated by the OC team to reflect their findings and shared with the Educator team in advance of a review meeting in which actions and a timeline for changes are agreed for future runs.

Depending on the extent of the updates made, launching an updated run may or may not be appropriate. If the changes are extensive, a second evaluation focusing on the impact of these changes may be carried out a year later. Most courses are then reviewed every 2 years by the Educators to check the course is still meeting its objectives and the content is up to date; a process managed by the OC team. OCAG may from time to time request an evaluation of a particular course.

23. The OC Evaluation Report Template has been designed for this purpose (Annex 3). The template, based on the University of Reading's Evaluation Framework, includes a section for reflection upon and an analysis of course statistics; qualitative comments and survey feedback; the achievement of course objectives and learning outcomes, placing greater emphasis on the impact of the course. The OC team will provide a set of recommendations to the Educator team for subsequent runs, based on this evaluation. The Educators, the OC team and the platform provider will continue to conduct quality checks at relevant points over the course lifecycle.
24. When reviewing course statistics, Educators are advised to be mindful of the context and to avoid making broad comparisons across courses. For example, any reflection on the number of enrolled learners or the retention rate over the duration of the course should be set in the context of the intended audience(s).
25. The OC team and Educators meet to discuss the evaluation report and proposed amendments

and agree any amendments to subsequent runs of the course. Amendments and changes to future runs and re-evaluated following Run 2. The OC team may complete further evaluation reports.

26. The OC Evaluation Report will then be sent to the Lead Educator for their information and if appropriate to share with the relevant School Management Board.
27. The Online Courses Programme Manager or the Senior Digital Learning Producer produce a (maximum 3 pages) over-arching, evaluative OC Annual Quality Assurance Report which will be considered by DELT during the Spring Term.

Version	Keeper	Reviewed	Approved by	Approval Date	Effective From
1	AGS	Every year	UBTL	28/04/2015	Immediately
2	AGS		UBTL	30/01/2017	Immediately
3	AGS		UBTLSE	30/11/2020	Immediately
4	AGS		UBTLSE	03/11/ 2023	Immediately
5	AGS		UBTLSE	30/10/2024	Immediately

Annex 1

Framework for Short Online Courses Programme

Introduction

The University of Reading's Short Online Courses (OC) Programme includes an established, wide ranging portfolio of non-credit bearing, short, online courses hosted on [FutureLearn](#); a UK-based digital education platform founded in 2012. One of the original FutureLearn Partners, the university's dedicated Online Courses team has developed extensive expertise and a reputation for excellence in creating innovative, engaging, high quality courses. Drawing on multiple sources to help identify key opportunities for new courses, they work in collaboration with experts from Schools and Functions across the University and prestigious, external partners such as The British Council, The Royal Meteorological Society and EIT Food.

A collaborative, team-based approach is applied to course design and production, involving multiple stakeholders across the University including students. The OC team continually innovates and builds core expertise in fully online learning and social learning pedagogies. Where appropriate courses have been designed and produced at speed to support key University initiatives.

Framework for Identifying and selecting new courses

The direction we take, and therefore the courses we identify and select, are influenced by several factors, outlined below in Figure 1. It is the combination of these factors, set in the context of a particular point in time, that provides a framework for our decision making. As such, discussion and dialogue are an important part of the process.

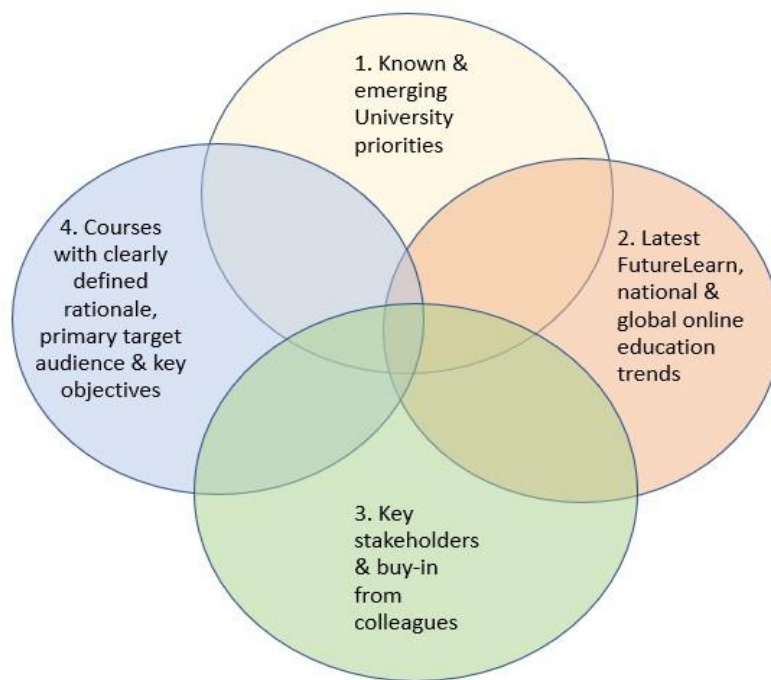


Figure 1.

1. Identify and consider known and emerging University priorities

The University is exploring a range of initiatives aimed at diversifying its educational offering beyond the standard 3-year campus-based degree, to reach new, non-traditional student audiences. Current projects include Apprenticeships, Lifelong Learning (LLL), Continuing Professional Development (CPD), and the Online Distance Learning project (ODL).

Non-traditional students are often looking for greater flexibility in the way they study, to help them fit this around work, family, and other commitments, and providing standalone online content or a mixed (blended) delivery will be key. We could provide support by creating:

- non-credit bearing short online courses to serve as recruitment tools onto online programmes.
- pathways of unbundled learning including non-credit bearing short courses and credit bearing microcredentials to enable learners to build up credits towards certificates, diplomas, and degrees

It is anticipated we will get further steers as these initiatives develop. We can also consider supporting other priorities linked to the University Strategy (for example our recent contribution to the climate education initiative) and to School and Departmental research and teaching objectives. OCAG will continue to play a key role in helping us identify potential opportunities for course development to support these and other priorities as they emerge.

2. Consider FutureLearn strategy & national/International

developments

There has been a fundamental shift over recent years in the way many view their university journey, career

paths and ongoing CPD, which has led to a growing demand for more flexible ways of accessing Higher Education learning.

FutureLearn offers a range of options to support flexible, 'unbundled', online learning pathways. Partners can now create short online courses, follow on ExpertTracks (bundles of short online courses and an assessment), credit bearing microcredentials and stand-alone online PG certificates and degrees. FutureLearn are also planning to drive up fee-paying subscriptions and invest in the development of their Enterprise (B2B and B2G) sales.

We will continue to monitor and review latest FutureLearn and online education developments and update OCAG to identify opportunities and inform the ongoing development and possible diversification of our programme of courses.

3. Identify, encourage open dialogue, and cultivate buy-in from key stakeholders

The OC team collaborates with an extensive network of stakeholders at every step of the course development lifecycle; from identifying a potential topic and educator team, to scoping, designing, producing, evaluating and promoting each course.

This network is an important source of ideas for possible new courses. A good example is the way we've worked with multiple Functions and students to develop a cohesive collection of online courses to support the University's Access & Participation objectives from pre application, to arriving and studying at university to preparing for next steps, post-graduation.

Identifying all the relevant stakeholders and securing their buy-in is essential for the success of every new course. OCAG plays a vital role in advising, guiding, and supporting the OC team regarding this aspect of OC programme development.

4. Course rationale and primary target audience

A business case must be submitted for every new course proposal. This document is reviewed by OCAG, who provide feedback, possible suggestions for improvement and recommendations regarding whether it should proceed. For new course proposals to be considered, including research funded projects, they must have a clearly defined rationale based on the following principles:

- aligns with overarching University agendas and priorities
- meets one or more of the strategic objectives included in Table 1. below
- led by an expert Educator team who have Head of School support, and are committed to creating the initial content & working with the OC team throughout the course lifetime
- aimed at one of the primary target audiences included in the table below
- targeting a primary target audience for each open course in no way excludes our local and global communities from participating in and benefitting from the content

Audience Objectives	Prospective students	Incoming students with accepted offers/pre-entry	Current students	Alumni	Professional Learners
Helps UoR students gain new knowledge and develop new skills					
Strengthens relationship between the University and students/alumni/ key strategic partners					
Supports Widening Participation					
Supports attainment, retention, and progression					
Supports recruitment (direct, and indirect through reputation)					
Provides CPD					

Table 1.

Annex 2

Course Business Case Proposal

Before you complete this document, please review the *Framework for Short Online Courses* (Annex A below) and contact Nicky McGirr Online Courses Programme Manager to discuss your idea. (n.mcgirr@reading.ac.uk)

Working course title	
Course Proposer (Name/School/Department/Function/email)	
Here is an opportunity to provide a clear rationale for the course. Why do you want to make this course? What are you trying to achieve?	
A: Driver/Rationale [What is the need, problem, or opportunity? What evidence is there for this need, problem or opportunity? What is unique about this course?] B: External/ Internal funding [Does this course proposal come with any funding (e.g., from external partner, research project). If relevant, please provide details.] C: Target audience [Please provide a brief description of your target audience. If your course is appropriate for more than one audience, please list these in approximate order or relevance] D: Institutional and departmental strategic priorities [Please provide detail on how your course meets key University or Departmental priorities or initiatives] E. Impact – key measures of success [If this project is approved the Online Course team will set up a meeting to discuss the various data sets and ways in which we can evaluate the impact. In advance, it would be helpful to understand at a top-level what I. success for this course would look like to you. II. if there are any key requirements, we need to be aware of e.g., objectives included within funded bids.] F: Competitors [Please provide details of any competing online courses and a brief summary of the key differences between your proposed course and any competitors. You may like to consider FutureLearn, Coursera, EdX and any subject specific LMS]	

Here is an opportunity to tell us more about the course. What will the learner achieve from taking the course?

G: Overview of the course

[Please provide a brief summary of the key topics you plan to cover in the course.]

H: Learner outcomes

[Describe the learning outcomes of the course (maximum 4- 8) which would appear on a certificate. What knowledge and skills will the target audience gain from completing the course?]

Here is an opportunity to provide clear detail about the commitment and support for the course.

Designing, developing and running an online course involves a substantial and ongoing commitment of time. Although the most significant workload is planning and preparing the course materials in advance of the first run, a course will typically run on an ongoing basis for several years. If the course is approved, the Educator is required to be a point of contact for the OC Team during this extended period to support ongoing evaluation, minor updates and other course related tasks. Please note we are required to secure written confirmation from your HoS that they are aware of and supportive of you devoting the necessary time to create and support the course on an ongoing basis.

I: Your commitment

[Please confirm you are willing to commit to the above for a minimum of two years].

J: Your HoS

[Please confirm that you have spoken to your HoS about this project. Please note we will require an email confirmation from your HoS that they are supportive before considering this proposal further.]

K: It is important your SDTL is aware of this project and how it fits in with the wider priorities of the Department or School.

[Does this course fit with any of the programmes within your Department, School or the wider University? Will it form part of a blended learning offering or will it be used as an optional, additional resource?]

L: Lead Educator details

[Give the name and email of the main person who will be responsible for the academic quality of the course.]

M: Other educators

[Will any other colleagues or external stakeholders be involved in this project. Please provide their name(s) and their role(s)]

N: Endorsement and Accreditation

[Please provide details of external bodies who could be approached to sponsor, endorse or accredit the course. Do you have a contact in any of these organisations? Please note there is often a fee attached for accreditation].

Here is your opportunity to share initial ideas for marketing the course and disseminating your research.

Targeted marketing is crucial for the success of an online course. It would be helpful in advance to understand who should be involved and any ideas you've had for promotion.

O: Marketing and outreach officers

[Who are the marketing and outreach officers for your School? Have you already discussed your idea for this proposed course with them?]

P: Promoting the online course

[Do you have any initial ideas for promoting the course? This may include upcoming key events or published works, following up with any of your key contacts in external organisations etc.]

Q: Sharing best practice across the University and wider

[How will the outcomes and impact of the work be disseminated? Are you planning to publish a paper about the course?]

Please send your completed form to Nicky McGirr Online Courses Programme Manager:

n.mcgirr@reading.ac.uk

Annex 3

Online Course evaluation

[Course name]
Course run: [run number] [run date]

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Reach

Measures numbers, coverage and usability of activities and involvement of participants and/ or targeted groups.

Course comparison measures

	Joiners	Active Learners	Social Learners	≥50% Step completion	≥90% Step completion
FutureLearn average					
[Course category averages]					
[Course name] Run [no.] [date]					
[Previous runs of same course]					
[Previous runs of same course]					
[Previous runs of same course]					

Mean numbers. Data as of [date] [complete data from FutureLearn stats]

Definitions:

- Active users: those (of any role) who have completed at least one Step at any time in any course week, including those who go on to become Leavers.
- Social Learners: are those (of any role) who have posted at least one comment on any Step.
- ≥50% Step completion: Learners who’ve marked 50% or more of Steps complete represents users (of any role) who have successfully completed 50% or more of the Steps contained within the course.
- ≥90% Step completion: Learners who’ve marked 90% or more of Steps complete represents users (of any role) who have successfully completed 90% or more of the Steps contained within the course.

Analysis: Course comparison

Xxxxx

Course enrolments by country

Other ()

In order of percentage (high to low). Data as of [date]. [complete data from FutureLearn stats]

Analysis: Country

XXXXX

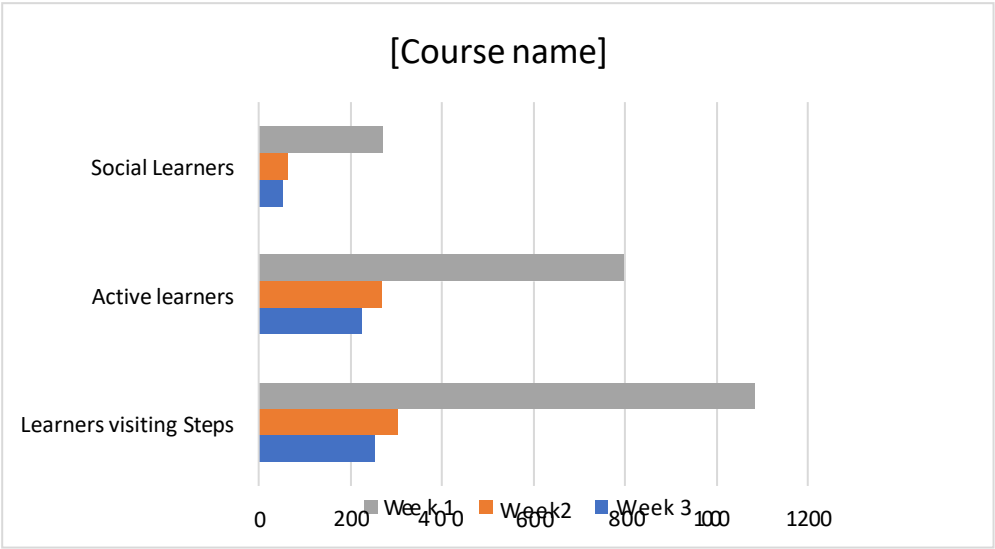
Reaction

Analyses feedback on participants’ reaction. Was it useful, engaging, interesting, enjoyable?

Statistics by week

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3
Learners visiting Steps			
Active Learners			
Social Learners			
Visited Steps			
Average visited Steps per user			
Completed Steps			
Average completed Steps per user			
Comments			
Average comments per user			

Data as of [date]. [complete data from FutureLearn stats]



Graph of key results. [To be edited to reflect the table data]

Analysis: Learners visiting Steps

xxxxx

Analysis: Social learners

xxxxx

Learning

Measures whether information has been absorbed and objectives have been met.

Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes	Result

[complete data from FutureLearn course page, and results with summaries of comments from the course]

Behaviour

Analyses the extent to which newly acquired skills, knowledge or attitudes are applied in different contexts.

Reflections

xxxxx

Results

Determines if there has been any positive impact on the strategic goals (e.g. KPIs) of the University e.g. access, participation, retention, attainment, progression.

Reflections

xxxxx

Refinement

Changes to the course required in response to feedback received by Learners and from reflections from the Online Courses team and the Educator team.

From previous run

STEP NUMBER	AMENDMENT SUMMARY	RESULT

Content change suggestions

STEP NUMBER	AMENDMENT SUMMARY

Final thoughts

XXXXX

Annex 4

Online Courses Advisory Group

Membership

Name	Role
Professor Elizabeth McCrum, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience)	Chair
Vicki Holmes, Head of Technology Enhanced Learning	Team member
Nicky McGirr, Online Courses Programme Manager	Team member
Professor Adrian Bell, Research Dean	Academic representation
Daniel Grant, Teaching and Learning Dean	Academic representation
Professor Lucinda Becker, School of Humanities (Department of English Literature)	Academic representation
Professor Angelique Chettiparamb (Henley Business School, Real Estate & Planning)	Academic representation
Dr Hilary Weller, Professor (Meteorology)	Academic representation
Professor Elisabeth Wilding, Professor (International Study and Language Institute)	Academic representation
Dr Andrew Ainslie, Associate Professor (Agriculture Policy and Development)	Academic representation
Lucy Petch, Marketing and Engagement Business Partner	Function representation
Amy Fairbrother, Global Recruitment (UK)	Function representation
Irem Ozsoy, Global Recruitment (International)	
Anne-Marie Henderson, Director of Student Success and Engagement	Function representation
Harriet Wallis, Senior Quality Support Officer	Secretary
Right of attendance	
Anastasia Rattigan, Senior Digital Learning Producer	Team Member
Yen Tu, Digital Learning Producer	Team Member

Terms of reference:

1. Advise on the direction of the University's programme of short online courses, ensuring alignment with the broader University Strategy and priorities.
2. Identify and provide feedback on new opportunities and ideas.
3. Review and act as a critical friend with regards to progress and developments.

4. Champion and raise awareness of the Online Courses Programme in University forums.

Reporting:

OCAG reports to the Sub-Committee on Delivery & Enhancement of Learning & Teaching (DELT)

