University of Reading

Approval and monitoring of Open 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 been changed to Online Courses (OC) Programme to include private, internal online courses for UoR students.

Permanent funding of the Online Courses Programme has been agreed in the University's Planning Template for the period 2020/21- 2024/25. The University's OCs are currently delivered via FutureLearn.]

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 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 OCs which are owned solely by the University of Reading or which have been developed by a consortium of which the University is the lead partner (see also paragraph 15 below). Where two or more Schools within the University are involved in the development and/or delivery of an OC, one School should be identified as the lead School.

4. Attached to this document are:

   a) *The Online Course Programme Strategy 2020/2021- 2023/2024 (Annex 1)*;

   b) updated *Online Courses Business Case Template (Annex 2)*;

   c) updated *Online Course Evaluation Report Template (Annex 3)*; and

   d) *OCAG membership and terms of reference 2020-21 (Annex 4)*.

Procedure for the development and approval of an Open Online Course

Initial development

5. The procedure for the development and approval of an OC begins in one of two ways:

   i. 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 will meet one or more OC Strategic Objectives as specified in the Online Courses: Strategy for 2020-2021 -2023/2024, appended to this document (Annex 1).

   ii. The 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, or on the recommendation of a Head of School/Function, Teaching and Learning Dean or similar, to discuss whether or not it will meet one or more of the OC strategic objectives.

   This meeting serves several purposes. It assists the OC Programme Manager to better understand the proposal and the Educators to understand the process for designing and producing a new course with the OC team, and the investment of time required to create and manage the first and subsequent runs of a course.

Business case and formal approval

6. If the proposed course meets one or more OC Strategic Objectives and the Educator is willing to proceed based on the resourcing and other requirements discussed, the OC Programme Manager will ask the Educator to complete and submit an OC Business Case to them, in line with the OC Business Case Template which is appended to this document (Annex 2).

7. At this stage, if they have not already done so, the Educator must also discuss the project and seek written approval from their Head of School/Head of Function to confirm that in principle, they are happy for the member of staff to proceed with the project if it is approved. The OC Programme Manager will meet with/liaise the HoS/Function to answer any questions regarding the resourcing of the project.

8. The OC Programme Manager will review the completed proposal and if necessary, suggest any changes and/or refinements to the Educator. The Educator will make any final changes to the Business Case Proposal. Once complete the OC Programme Manager will submit the Proposal together with their recommendations, to the Online Courses Advisory Group (OCAG), for feedback and comment.

9. The OCAG will review and provide feedback on the Business Case Proposal and the OC Programme Manager's recommendations, considering the OC Programme's and the

University's broader Strategic Objectives. The Group may provide suggestions for how the Business Case Proposal might be further developed to help meet these.

10. Depending on the recommendations of OCAG, the OC Programme Manager will either approve the Business Case Proposal or invite the Educator to develop the Business Case Proposal further to respond to these suggestions. At the OC Programme Manager discretion, the revised Business Case Proposal may be presented to OCAG for further comment.

11. The OC Programme Manager will inform the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching & Learning) and the Teaching and Learning Dean who sits on the OCAG, when courses have been approved.

Post-approval

12. Following the decision of the OC Programme Manager, a Digital Learning Producer is appointed who leads on scoping, course design, course development and production of the online course. This is overseen by the Online Courses Programme Manager through weekly meetings to identify potential blockers.

13. The OC team use the Scoping Document Template to confirm: the target audience, key objectives and how these will be measured during evaluation, the task and all relevant stakeholders. It also specifies a timetable for the course development in association with Schools, external events, and the platform provider's schedule. Educators formally agree the finished scoping document and course development schedule via email/ meeting.

14. The OC team and Educators meet to develop the online course structure based on the agreed 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.

15. 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.

16. 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 to 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.

17. With guidance from the OC team, Educators are responsible for obtaining permission for all 3rd party materials. Records must be provided for each permission clearance to be stored centrally by the OC team.

18. 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.

19. The platform provider(s) may also conduct quality checks on OC content. 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.

20. 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.

21. 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 any code of conduct provided by the platform(s).

22. The OC is released according to the previously-agreed schedule and monitored by the Educator team or a supervised mentor team.

23. The release of the OC is reported to the OC Advisory Group and within regular CQSD updates to DELT and to the relevant School Management Board.

Modifications to the approval process

24. Where an OC is not managed by the University's OC team, but has been developed by a consortium of which the University is a partner and where the University's name will be associated with course, the OCAG will retain the right to comment and approve the course content. The OCAG must clarify who will be responsible for conducting quality assurance checks on the initial and all subsequent runs of the OC. All co-branded course materials must adhere to the University of Reading's co-branding guidelines.

Monitoring of Open Online Courses

25. The OC team will produce a formal evaluation report after the first run of a course to share with the Educator team which will fulfil a quality assurance function and encourage enhancement of learning and teaching. The OCAG may from time to time, request an evaluation of a particular course.

26. 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 on each subsequent run of an OC.

27. 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).

28. 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 after subsequent runs; however, there is no formal requirement.

29. The OC Evaluation Report will then be signed off by the Lead Educator and shared with the relevant School Management Board.

30. The Online Courses Programme Manager or the Senior Digital Learning Producer produces a (maximum 3 pages) over-arching, evaluative OC Annual Quality Assurance Report which will be considered by DELT during the Spring Term, alongside the Annual Quality Assurance Reports.

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

Annex 1

Online Courses: Strategy for 2020-21 – 2023/2024

From August 2020, Online Courses activity is funded centrally by the University with a contribution from Access and Participation (£90k).

The Online Courses' work and activity will balance, and where possible align, 5 priorities. The selection of courses and activities will be guided by their relevance to these priorities.

Rank	Priority	Rationale
1	Develop courses to support the following key strategic areas for the University, including: a) Domestic and international recruitment U/G and P/G b) Progression into employment c) Research strengths and impact d) 'Engaged University' and lifelong learning e) Collaborations/partnerships with prestigious, external organisations	To help the University: a) meet its domestic and international recruitment targets for 2021-2022 and beyond. We will work closely with the Global Recruitment & Student Engagement teams to target courses at pre entry students, teachers/parents/and other influencers. b) meet its onward employment targets c) evidence strengths, impact, and dissemination of research d) in its development of Lifelong Learning e) raise its profile
2	Develop a proportion of courses per year that support under-represented groups (*see list below)	To help the University fulfil its Access and Participation plan, with particular focus on the following areas: • access to HE via OOCs • attainment in HE via internal facing, invitation only courses (adding value for current and prospective students) • successful progression into employment and further studies – via OOCs and internal facing, invitation only courses
3	As appropriate, support teaching and learning aspects of the Phase 3 of the Post-Covid-19 Response programme (implementing the work of Phase 1 and 2).	To support the re-imagining of the University of Reading for a new age
4	a) Build links with the University's new fully online distance learning programme b) Learn from the University's new	a) To support, complement and increase uptake of the University's ODL activity. (Example: creating free OOCs to 'front end' each programme and act as recruitment tools by

	online distance learning programme	offering potential students a preview/taster) b) To develop internal capacity for production of online distance learning and increase self-sufficiency. This could range from micro-credentials to full programmes.
5	a) Generate direct revenue through, for example, course upgrade sales, paid-for micro-credentials. b) Attract external funding through collaborating with internal and/or external stakeholders to secure third party funding. c) Generate direct revenue through consultancy services to external organisations	To provide an income stream for Online Courses. [Note: appropriate consultancy charging rates for external consultancy and services to be considered)

*Under-represented groups

- Disabled students
- Students from low-income households
- Students from low HE participation postcodes
- Mature students
- First generation HE attenders
- Black and minority ethnic students
- No students specifically targeted, but tackles a challenge often encountered by underrepresented students in HE.

Annex 2

Online Course Business Case Proposal

Before you complete this document, we recommend contacting Nicky McGirr Online Courses Programme Manager to discuss your ideas. (n.mcgirr@reading.ac.uk)

Course title	
Contact/s (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?

Although each new proposal will be considered on a case by case basis, the Online Courses Advisory Group will be looking to see if your proposed course aligns with one or more of the following Online Courses Programme objectives.

1. *Meeting Access and Participation Fund Requirements.*
2. *Meet the following key strategic objectives for the University: recruitment, building links with the community, research and teaching excellence profile raising, sustainability.*
3. *Revenue Generation*
4. *Building Links with the University's new distance learning programme*
5. *Meeting a specific Departmental objective*

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: 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]

C: Institutional and departmental strategic priorities

[Which of the strategic objectives listed in italics above will your course help to meet and how?]

D: Competitors

[Please provide details of any competing courses you have found online and a brief summary of the key differences between your proposed course and any competitors.]

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

E: Overview of the course, week by week

[Describe the content of the course week by week, and what you plan to do? No need to go into depth here - just outline the key theme(s) that will be covered in each week. E.g. "Week 1 - Cardiovascular anatomy and physiology. Introducing the anatomy of the heart and cardiovascular system and how it works.]

F: Learner outcomes

[Describe the learning outcomes of the course (maximum 4) 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 impact of the course.

Measuring impact is a requirement for each of our online courses. 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 and therefore success of an online course. It would be helpful in advance to understand what measurements of success you would be particularly keen to explore.

G: Success

[What will success look like? What will be the impact of this course? If possible, break down at the five different levels of the Evaluation and Impact Framework. More information on the five levels of impact can be found here.]

Level 1 Reach	[Measures numbers, coverage and usability of activities and involvement of participants and/or targeted groups. E.g. Number of learners, number of completers]
Level 2 Reaction	[Analyses feedback on participants' reaction, was it useful, engaging, interesting, enjoyable?]
Level 3 Learning	[Measures whether information has been absorbed and objectives have been met. E.g. Change in behaviour, attitude, knowledge, skill]
Level 4 Behaviour	[Analyses the extent to which newly acquired skills, knowledge, or attitudes are applied in different contexts]
Level 5 Results	[Determines if there has been any positive impact on the strategic objectives (e.g. KPIs) of the University e.g. access, participation, retention, attainment, progression. Results could also cover impact on more localised objectives at School or Departmental level]

H: Evaluation

[Which methods of evaluation will you use to measure success? What datasets might you need to access? Help formulating evaluation questions can be found here.]

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 two-three times per year on an ongoing basis and will require the Educator team to support each 'run'; either by facilitation themselves or by overseeing a team of student mentors.

It is important that your Head of School is aware of this workload. 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 complete the first run of the course, and to continuing to support two-three further runs per year for at least 2 years, should this proposal receive approval to go ahead.

I: Your commitment

[Please confirm you are willing to commit to monitoring and facilitating at least two - three runs of the course for 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: Main Educator details

[Give the name, email and phone number of the main person to contact re this proposal.]

M: Other educators

[It is important to have support from colleagues for writing, developing and checking content, as well as help in managing discussions while the course is running. Please provide a list of the name(s), email addresses (s) and phone number(s) of other members of the Educator team. Please list academics who will be involved and indicate whether they will act as visible Educators on the course or just support its development.]

N: External stakeholders

[Will any external experts or organisations be contributing content or other resources to the course? Please explain their role within the project.]

O: Endorsement and Accreditation

[Are there any external bodies who would endorse or accredit the course? Do you have a contact in this organisation?]

P: Funding

[Do you have any funding which could be contributed to production costs? Include details of any funding bids linked to the course and/or sponsorship.]

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. If this project is approved the Online Course team will set up a meeting to discuss course promotion. It would be helpful in advance to understand who should be involved and any ideas you've had for promotion.

Q: Marketing and outreach officers

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

R: Key contacts

[Please share any key contacts in external organisations who may be interested in promoting the course. Are you aware of any external organisations that may be willing to offer this course to their staff for CPD? If so, do you have a contact in this organisation?]

S: Promoting the online course

[How will you be promoting the course?]

T: 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]

Contents

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:

<u>Active users</u>: 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.

<u>Social Learners</u>: are those (of any role) who have posted at least one comment on any Step.

<u>≥50% Step completion</u>: 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.

<u>≥90% Step completion</u>: 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]
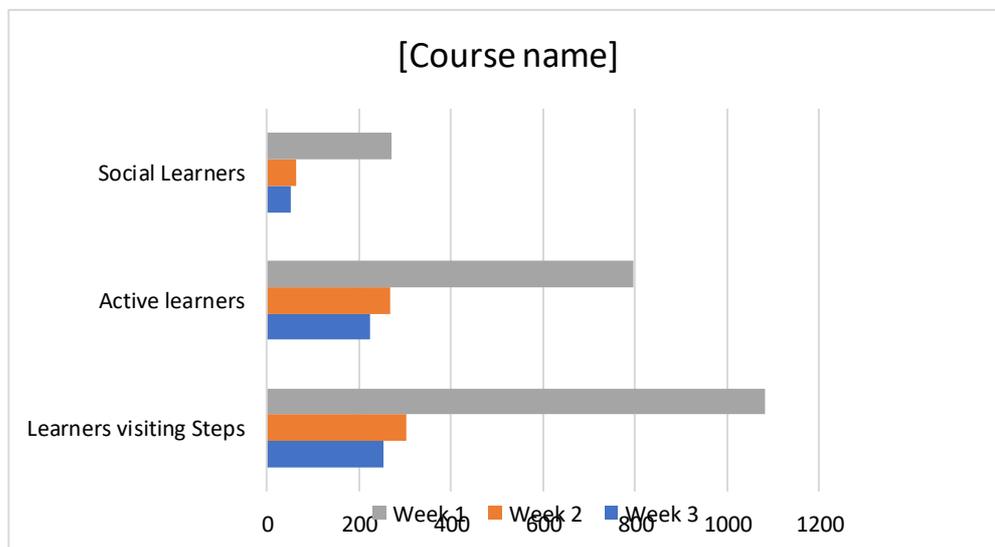
Graph of key results. [To be edited to reflect the table data]

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

Governance

Annex 4
Online Courses Advisory Group

Membership

Name	Role
Professor J Park, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience)	Chair
Ms V Holmes, Head of Technology Enhanced Learning	Team member
Ms N McGirr, Online Courses Programme Manager	Team member
Professor A Williams, Research Dean (Health)	Academic representation
Professor H Bilton, Professor (Institute of Education)	Academic representation
Professor E Wilding, Professor (International Study and Language Institute)	Academic representation
Dr A Ainslie, Associate Professor (Agriculture Policy and Development)	Academic representation
Dr S Allman, Lecturer (Chemistry, Food & Pharmacy)	Academic representation
Ms L Petch, Marketing and Engagement Business Partner	Function representation
Mr C Garrett, Global Recruitment (International) Ms A Fairbrother, Global Recruitment (UK)	Function representation
A Henderson, Director of Student Success and Engagement	Function representation
Ms K Smith, Senior Governance Officer	Secretary
Right of attendance	
Ms A Rattigan, Senior Digital Learning Producer	Function representation

Terms of reference:

1. Advise on the direction of the University's programme of 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:

The Online Courses Advisory Group reports to the Sub-Committee on Delivery and Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (DELT)