SECTION D THE VALIDATION OF DISTANCE LEARNING PROPOSALS

1 General Considerations

1.1 This section describes the processes involved in the validation of Distance Learning (DL) proposals - the first part of the section addresses the validation of courses delivered entirely by distance learning; section 6 addresses the validation of the delivery of a specific module by distance learning. DL is a mode of delivery whereby teaching content (on-line and hard copy), academic mentoring, assessment and all other pedagogic and pastoral functions are provided and maintained by University staff for students who study (usually part-time) at locations remote from the University, such that teaching staff and students do not ever meet in the same physical location and may or may not make use of flexible delivery methods to meet and interact ‘virtually’. Courses where students and teaching staff meet for the purposes of an induction only and all other aspects of the course are delivered as described above will be classed as DL for the purposes of validation and reporting. Distance Learning differs from Collaborative Learning in that there is no element of collaboration with another institution for the provision of local support.

1.2 All staff responsible for designing and delivering on-line materials must meet the University's minimum training requirement, as defined in the Digital Literacies for Staff (DLS) grid. It is the responsibility of schools via STLC/SAVP to maintain records of staff who meet the training requirements and to check and confirm that all relevant staff meet the training requirements before validation.

1.3 These procedures have been devised to ensure:
   i) that the processes of validation give full consideration to the mechanisms and resources required for delivery of the courses and to support students, as well as to their academic content;
   ii) that both the University and the staff team are provided with an opportunity to evaluate and develop the course in the light of experience so as to assure the highest quality standards.

2 Administrative Procedures for Validation

2.1 The initiative to consider the validation of a course of Distance Learning study must be taken by the School responsible for that subject area. The proposed financial and resource arrangements must be approved by the Dean of the School.

2.2 Courses, including their mode of delivery, must be validated before recruitment can commence.

2.3 All Distance Learning proposals will require a University validation.

2.4 The procedures for validating a Distance Learning proposal will be the same as for a University validation for a course delivered at the University (see Section B. of the University’s Quality Assurance Procedures for Taught Courses and Research Awards), except where noted below under 3.

3 The Validation Process

3.1 The purpose of the validation event, in addition to that for a course being delivered internally, will be to establish that the proposed course is capable of being delivered
in a Distance Learning environment, and that the School has the resources and
capacity to support the course and the students enrolled on the course.

3.2 The composition of the validation panel will be as detailed in section B of this
Handbook and the subject specialist external panel member must have experience of
distance learning.

3.3 The course documentation should, in addition to the content specified in Section B
1.2 ‘Documents required for validation’, address the following issues:

   i) **Rationale for the course**
      a) A clear rationale for the proposed distance learning course should be
         provided which explains the difference between the proposed course and
         that of other courses within the Department and the School.
      b) The rationale should consider the relationship of the proposed course to the
         University’s Teaching and Learning Strategy, clearly identifying the
         responsibilities of each category of staff.
      c) If the course is also delivered in a conventional face-to-face mode, the
         rationale should explain why it is considered appropriate to deliver the
         course by distance learning and why it is appropriate to deliver it through the
         particular means (e.g. internet or hard copy) proposed.

   ii) **Admissions policy**
      a) Any variations to University-based admission requirements or specific
         provision for identifying applicants to whom Distance Learning is an
         appropriate delivery mechanism should be detailed, including, where
         appropriate, minimum levels of C&IT proficiency and English language
         competence.

   iii) **Target Market**
      a) The target market for the course should be described, including the location
         of the students and the plans for promoting the award. If it is intended that
         students will be located outside the UK, any issues of foreign government
         approval and relevant local laws relating to, inter alia, consumer protection,
         employment, packaging and postal despatch should be addressed.

   iv) **Delivery and support of the course**
      a) The student materials being provided should be described, whether they are
         being developed in-house or bought in, how they will be updated and of the
         legal issues (in particular those of copyright) which have been considered.
      b) The means of delivery of the teaching and library materials must be
         described in detail, as must any implications for potential students in terms
         of requirements for access to IT equipment, specific levels of software and
         so on. Any proposed arrangements for access to library material through
         other institutions should be described. Where relevant, the implications of
         delivering teaching materials and assessment across time zones should be
         considered.
      c) The arrangements for providing students with feedback should be provided,
         including through what medium (e.g. on-line, e-mail) and arrangements for
         follow-up support.
      d) The arrangements by which students will be able to communicate with
         University staff should be defined.
      e) If student collaborative learning will be a feature of the course, a statement
         of how it will be achieved should be provided, including a description of
facilities such as electronic discussion groups, live chat rooms and group work.

f) The specific technical support which may be proposed for staff and/or students should be described. It should be made clear if no technical support will be provided for students, especially if the course will be delivered over the Internet.

g) CVs of academic staff members involved in the delivery should be provided along with confirmation from the School that staff meet the training requirements of the Digital Literacies for Staff grid and details of any provision proposed for staff development in respect of the producing and updating of distance learning materials (if in-house) and/or the use of technology.

h) Proposals for the provision of the necessary time for academic staff to support delivery of the course and the development and updating of student materials (if in-house) should be described. This could include the basis upon which academic members of staff will have their timetables credited with teaching hours.

i) Details should be given of any Departmental/School requirements for hardware and software;

j) A statement of the requirement for technical and administrative support staff to be involved in the course should be provided;

k) A draft student handbook should be submitted, which should include detailed explanations of what students can expect from the course, what support they will receive, and of progression and assessment criteria. If the course is being delivered over the Internet, the draft handbook should state minimum hardware and software specifications, together with guidance to students in the event of loss of Internet access. Where it is not delivered over the Internet, but the student materials require students to have access to C&IT equipment (e.g. if CDs are used), students should be advised of the minimum hardware and software specifications;

l) A draft induction programme should be submitted.

v) Assessment and quality assurance

a) Arrangements for quality assurance and external examiners should be defined.

b) The means of assessment should be described where they will differ from an internally-delivered course, and any specific arrangements which are proposed because of the Distance Learning delivery.

c) The monitoring mechanisms which are proposed to ensure that the expected level of student support is being provided should be described.

d) The monitoring mechanisms which are proposed to record students' progress and identify students experiencing difficulties, including the arrangements for gathering student feedback on their learning experience should be described.

3.4 The initial approval for a Distance Learning course shall be for a maximum period of five years.

3.5 The validation event will consist of discussions between the panel and representatives of the course team.

3.6 The Assistant Registrar or nominee will prepare a report of the event. The report will be approved by the University’s Teaching and Learning Committee.
4. Annual evaluation

4.1 The annual evaluation report should conform to the standard pro forma approved by the University including a discussion of any issues arising from Distance Learning delivery. The report will be considered by the School delivering the course at its annual evaluation meeting.

5. Revalidation

5.1 Revalidation is a mechanism through which the Senate reviews and assesses the quality of provision of University courses. The University’s Teaching and Learning Committee is responsible for ensuring that each approved Distance Learning course is subject to re-validation at least once every five years.

5.2 The course team will submit documentation which will be scrutinised by means of a revalidation event held at the University which will be organised by the Registry on behalf of the University’s Teaching and Learning Committee. The membership of the approval panel will be as defined in Section B of this Handbook.

5.3 Revalidation of Distance Learning courses will concentrate on the following:

i) evidence of continuing demand;
ii) appropriateness of delivery medium and learning resources;
iii) feedback from students;
iv) consideration of annual evaluation reports;
v) student progression and achievement statistics;
vi) procedures for quality assurance;
viii) rationale for the School’s continuing involvement.

The documentation submitted to the panel should focus on issues listed above and should incorporate critical appraisal where appropriate.

5.4 The revalidation event will consist of discussions between the panel and representatives of the course team.

5.5 The Assistant Registrar or nominee will prepare a report of the event. The report will be approved by the University’s Teaching and Learning Committee.

6 Validation of individual modules to be delivered on a distance learning basis

6.1 The School must secure confirmation from the Head of Registry that the extent to which delivery of a course is undertaken by means of distance learning does not require the course in its entirety to be subject to a full distance learning validation event.

6.2 The School appoints an external referee or scrutineer (who has had no close involvement with the University in the previous three years) with appropriate subject expertise and experience in distance learning models to look at the module, its learning materials and its assessment. The nomination of the scrutineer must be approved by the Head of Registry in advance of any involvement in the validation.

6.3 The referee or scrutineer submits a written report on the proposal for consideration by the SAVP. The report should cover:

i) is the module coherent in terms of its content and aims?
ii) do the proposed e-learning processes/arrangements comply with the QAA Code of Practice and University regulations?

iii) is the proposed assessment appropriate and secure?

iv) are the mechanisms for students to express their views and share experiences with others sufficient?

6.4 The written report and the full set of learning and assessment materials must be submitted for approval by the SAVP.

6.5 It is the responsibility of the SAVP to check and confirm that staff designing or delivering modules meet the training requirements of the Digital Literacies for Staff grid.