Flexible and distributed learning (FDL) is the term used to denote educational provision leading to an award or credit of an awarding institution delivered and/or supported and/or assessed through means that generally do not require the student to attend particular classes or events at particular times and particular locations (eg Distance Learning).

It is important that all students studying through the medium of FDL should understand the nature of their formal relationship with the University and, where appropriate, which organisation involved in the delivery of their course or programme is responsible for which part of their learning experience. Provision for students on FDL courses and programmes should be planned, delivered and monitored as rigorously as is that for on-campus students.

Documentation available to the student in advance of their programme of study should clearly set out:
- the respective responsibilities of the University and of those responsible for delivery of the programme of study where these are not the same;
- full details of the programme of study and of the courses which make up that programme and the relationships between them;
- the intended learning outcomes and the teaching, learning and assessment methods of each unit or module;
- a schedule for delivery of study materials;
- a schedule of deadlines for formative and summative assessment;
- information about the University’s appeals and disciplinary procedures.

The information above should be made available in a variety of formats.

Delivery systems for FDL should be fit for purpose, safe, reliable and have an appropriate availability and life expectancy. The systems must be fully tested before they are used for teaching or student support. They must be able to confirm and retain a readily accessible record of when material has been received by the student.

A business continuity assessment must be carried out and contingency plans put in place so that, if the main delivery system for FDL fails, there is a back-up system that can be used in its place.

Schools must ensure that students on FDL courses receive adequate induction and preparation. This should include a statement explaining the University’s position on academic dishonesty, including plagiarism or attempts to pass off somebody else’s work as their own, and students should be asked to confirm acceptance of the terms of the statement.

Where provision is delivered by distance learning, schools should ensure that students receive adequate training in the skills needed to access materials and that they have access to competent technical support, whether locally or remotely. The Centre for Learning and Teaching is available to support Schools and Colleges offering teaching by distance learning.
9 Students should be fully informed at the beginning of their studies about the availability of academic, technical and pastoral support, including on-line support and opportunities for face-to-face meetings, and the anticipated response times to requests for information or help. Students should be made aware of what support is available to them, in terms for example of academic support, library and IT support, careers guidance, and what is provided by the University and what is made available through the partner institution.

10 Students should receive a clear explanation of the nature and extent of the autonomous, collaborative and supported aspects of learning. This should include a realistic estimate of the time commitment expected of them and of their responsibilities as learners in terms of responding to requests for information and participating in individual or group activities. Students should also be informed clearly at the start of the course about any required or optional residential classes or field trips that they should attend or are recommended to attend.

11 Students should have a named adviser who can give them authoritative guidance on the progress of their studies and constructive feedback on academic performance. Students should also have regular opportunities for discussions with other learners. The rules and procedures for communication with other students and members of staff should be clearly laid out at the start of the course.

12 In common with other Aberdeen students, students on FDL programmes should have regular opportunities to give feedback on the course and their learning experience. Where the course is supported by an external provider, responsibility for processing feedback from students should be clearly identified as should the responsibility for informing students about the outcome of their feedback.

13 In common with other Aberdeen students, students studying via FDL should receive early notification of the methods, criteria and regulations for assessment, including the relative weighting of elements of the course where appropriate.

14 In common with other Aberdeen students, students studying via FDL should be given adequate opportunities for timely formative assessment and appropriate feedback.

15 The School must ensure that there are secure and reliable means of transferring students’ work for assessment and that there is a means of proving or confirming that the work is properly attributed to the student who produced it and that it has been safely received within any deadline. Students must have clear instructions on the format and security measures they should adopt when forwarding work electronically or by mail, including the advisability of keeping a copy. Every effort must be made to ensure that the work submitted is the students’ own original work.